

While there are deep and divisive fissures across the political spectrum over how to combat terrorism, there is a surprising level of agreement as to its cause.

"We fight against poverty because hope is an answer to terror," President Bush told an audience in Mexico in 2002.

Kim Dae Jung, the former dissident who became the president of South Korea and won the Nobel Peace Prize, agrees: **"At the bottom of terrorism is poverty."**

This sort of analysis, at its root, is optimistic.

It holds out the prospect that widespread prosperity can be a universal solvent for political violence employed by states and stateless actors alike. But it is a mistake to assume people can be persuaded to put aside their differences in order to collaborate on a common project of promoting global prosperity. For better or worse, human beings are social animals, deeply concerned about rank and status, both as individuals and as members of communities.

Ambition and humiliation, personal and collective, inspire more political conflict than economic deprivation.

If our goal is to understand the conditions that give terrorist movements popular appeal and to understand how virulent ideologies turn into mass movements, our focus must be on subjective perceptions of national, religious and ethnic humiliation, rather than on the humiliation — genuine as it may be — that is associated with poverty.

Revolutions may be waged in the name of the poor and dispossessed, but they are usually made by the relatively rich. The members of al-Qaeda are no exception. They are not the dispossessed, but the empowered. Many studied for high-end careers in medicine and engineering at universities, rather than at some dirt-poor madrasa. Osama bin Laden himself studied economics and later spent time working at his family's giant construction business.

Terrorist or Rotarian?

In his 2004 book *Understanding Terror Networks*, former CIA case officer Marc Sageman concluded that al-Qaeda was not a group of feckless, unemployed no-hopers. In his sample of jihadist terrorists, two-thirds had gone to college. They were generally professionals; their average age was 26. Three-fourths were married, and many had children.

In 1999, the Library of Congress issued a study asking, "Who becomes a terrorist and why?" and concluded that there were only a few "major exceptions to the middle- and upper-class origins of terrorist groups" and that terrorists generally "have more than average education."

In other words, asking, "Who becomes a terrorist?" turns out to be much like asking, "Who becomes a Rotarian?"

In the face of this evidence, many invoke 20th-century Germany as Exhibit A in the argument for the deprivation thesis. The Great Depression, the argument goes, with the impoverishment of much of the German middle class, helped to create the conditions for Hitler's rise. But what really motivated many Germans to embrace Nazism was the outcome of World War I, and the conditions of that defeat. In short, they were humiliated.

Hitler's goal, supported by much of the German elite, was to reverse the verdict of World War I and proceed to create a Eurasian empire capable of dominating the world. Indeed, the outcome of World War I enraged Arab nationalists, as well as German nationalists — and it still does today.

Mr. bin Laden sees the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which led to the carving up of the Ottoman Empire, as the beginning of Arab humiliation. "We still suffer from the injuries inflicted by ... the Sykes-Picot Agreement between Britain and France which divided the Muslim world into fragments," he has said.

The central role of communal humiliation in inspiring terrorism is the key finding of University of Chicago political scientist Robert Pape's study of suicide bombers, *Dying to Win*. According to Mr. Pape, two factors have linked suicide bombers of different causes. First, they are members of communities that feel humiliated by genuine or perceived occupation (such as the perceived occupation of the sacred territory of Saudi Arabia by virtue of the presence of U.S. bases, in the eyes of Mr. bin Laden and his allies). Second, suicide bombers seek to change the policies of democratic occupying powers like Israel and the United States by influencing their public opinion — in a sense making the occupying power suffer the same level of humiliation they have felt.

The humiliation theory of radical

violence helps explain why so many terrorists come from middle-class or wealthy backgrounds.

Unlike economic deprivation, national or religious humiliation can be painful to all members of a community. In fact, communal humiliation is likely to aggrivate the affluent members the most, precisely because their freedom from a day-to-day struggle to survive liberates them to brood over slights to the community in which they are natural leaders. It may also explain why so many are willing to sacrifice innocent bystanders for their cause. They are fighting for an abstract idea of national, ethnic, or religious pride, not the masses.

To be sure, humiliation can be an outgrowth of poverty. *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman has cited the sense of personal and collective humiliation associated with poverty: "Sure, poverty doesn't cause terrorism — no one is killing for a raise. But poverty is great for the terrorism business because poverty creates humiliation and stifled aspirations."

Looking for a cure

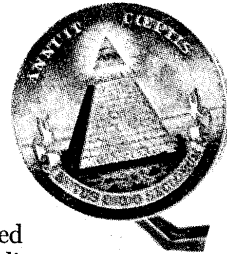
In the same way that poverty is never the primary cause of terrorism, prosperity is hardly the cure. Alexis de Tocqueville was only the first of many to recognize that revolutions often occur in times when populations experience rising expectations about living standards. At least in some societies, the diffusion of wealth and education may help radicals recruit new allies.

Regardless of where they stand on this debate, most experts have concluded that no conceivable concessions — short of expunging Western influence from the Muslim world and bringing Taliban-like regimes to power throughout it — can appease Mr. bin Laden, his followers and his allies.

Moreover, "Marshall Plans" for the Middle East, however justified they may be on other grounds, will not make al-Qaeda and its sympathizers feel less humiliated. For instance, as a result of the 1978 Camp David peace accords, the United States has transferred tens of billions of dollars to Egypt.

This transfer of aid coincided with the worst period of terrorism in Egypt's history; Islamist terrorists assassinated President Anwar Sadat in 1981 and killed more than 1,000 other Egyptians during the 1990s.

The first priority, therefore, of an anti-radical strategy must be defending the people, territories and interests of the United States and other targeted regimes against terrorist attacks.



Passive defenses to keep terrorists out are important, along with active security measures. The United States must work with other nations, including unsavory ones, to apprehend jihadists if possible and kill them if necessary.

While Mr. bin Laden and his allies must simply be defeated, their appeal to potential new recruits can be limited by policies that reduce feelings of collective humiliation in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

According to a recent National Intelligence Estimate, the American occupa-

tion of Iraq is now inspiring jihadists in the way that the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, Russian control of Chechnya and Indian rule over Kashmiri Muslims long have done.

Ending the humiliating occupation of Muslim populations by non-Muslim nations will remove some of the major grievances that jihadists use as a recruiting tool.

Conversely, to perpetuate these deeply resented occupations in the name of fighting "Islamofascism" will only help the jihadists.

In addition, major Muslim nations that are sources of jihadist recruits must change, too. If there were more open societies in the Muslim world, there might be more political space for Islamists who reject terrorism.

Reducing poverty in the Middle East and around the world is a laudable goal in itself, for humanitarian reasons. But it would be a mistake to treat prosperity as a universal solvent that can deprive jihadists like Mr. bin Laden of allies and sympathizers in populations that feel humiliated.

The campaign against jihadism and the campaign against global poverty are both justified.

But they are not the same war.

MIDDLE CLASS JIHADISTS

The following are among the many prominent figures in the al-Qaeda terrorist network with privileged backgrounds and higher education:

Osama bin Laden: Al-Qaeda's commander in chief. His father, a construction magnate, was among the wealthiest non-royals in Saudi Arabia. He studied economics and business administration at a University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri: Osama bin Laden's closest adviser and personal physician. Both of his parents belonged to prominent Egyptian families. His father was a professor of pharmacology; his two sisters became physicians and two brothers, architects. He earned a degree in surgery from Cairo University medical school.

Mohamed Atta: leader of the Sept. 11 terrorists. He was raised in a middle-class family in Egypt; his father was an attorney. He studied urban planning at universities in Egypt and Germany.

Khalid Shaikh Mohammed: organizer of the Sept. 11 attacks. Raised in Kuwait, he graduated from North Carolina A&T University with a degree in mechanical engineering. He was captured in Pakistan in 2003.

Raed Hijazi: Sentenced to death by a Jordanian court for the so-called Millennium Plot, intended to blow up a Jordanian hotel and two Christian tourist sites on Dec. 31, 1999. A U.S. citizen, he was born into relative privilege in San Jose, Calif., and studied business administration at California State University in Sacramento.

Mamdouh Mahmud Salim: Al-Qaeda financier and described at one time as bin Laden's closest friend. He studied electrical engineering in Iraq. Captured in Germany in 1998, he is in U.S. custody in Colorado.

Motivation for mayhem