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INFORMAL GATHERING OF WORLD ECONOMIC LEADERS (IGWEL)  
WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM ANNUAL MEETING 2005, DAVOS

WORKING LUNCH SESSION ON TERRORISM: UNDERSTANDING THE STRUGGLE IN WHICH WE ARE ENGAGED

13:00-15.00 SATURDAY 29 JANUARY 2005

In the short time that is available to me, permit me to make eight brief points.

First, if we are going to understand the contemporary i.e. post 9/11 struggle against terrorism, it is critically important that we concentrate on generating clarity rather than confusion, light rather than heat. This is not easy given the complication of politics masquerading as religion, the calculations of geopolitical considerations and economic self interests. It is important that we deduce truth from fact. All sides should be prepared to give up some of our most comfortable assumptions and rationalising prejudices, and biases.

The second point I would like to make is that the struggle against Al-Qaeda style terrorism is essentially a political struggle, not a military one, certainly not a religious one. We play into the terrorist's hands if we prosecute a war against Islam and against Muslims. The Al-Qaeda and Al-Qaeda-inspired terrorists have a political motive. The Al-Qaeda terrorist and the Al-Qaeda-inspired terrorist employ violence, but violence is only a means, a method to a political objective.

Thirdly, our global war against terrorism must be aimed at fighting specific terrorists. The Al-Qaeda network and the Al-Qaeda inspired terrorists number in the thousands. We must go against these thousands with all at our command. But we must make sure we do not turn a war against thousands into a war against hundreds of thousands or against millions of others who have nothing in common with these terrorists other than perhaps to share their surnames, their nationalities or their dressing.

The fourth point I would like to make is that terrorism cannot survive and flourish unless it has support and sympathy from among the people. It is from this support that the terrorist group gets its recruits, its financial resources and its intelligence. Without water, there can be no fish. If the pond is small, the fish will be few and small. If the sea is large, there will be many fish and they will grow in size. In the case of the Al-Qaeda, its associates and the terrorists it inspires, the support comes from groups in several countries and continents. The Al-Qaeda espouses and exploits causes that are strongly felt particularly but by no means exclusively, in the Arab and Muslim world.

The fifth point I would like to make is that if the terrorist group is small, it would suffice to use punitive measures and coercive force to eliminate it. But if the terrorist movement and network is like the Al-Qaeda, with presence in several countries and

continents, coercive and denial measures alone will not work. Indeed, the worst strategy to adopt would be a "war" strategy dominated by a military mind-set and approach. Doctrines based on overwhelming force and deadly airstrikes that reduce ancient cities to rubble, that raze innocent people's homes and livelihoods, and that lead to great loss of lives, are exactly what terrorists and insurgents want. We must not give it to them. A whole new generation of terrorists and insurgents are created, and the hate and resentment spread far beyond. And all of us who are in the forefront of the global campaign against terrorism, my country and people included, will pay the price. In fighting today's limited and circumscribed war, we must take the greatest care not to sow the seeds for wars that would make the current one look like a picnic. If we are short-sighted and can not see the writing on the wall, we will undoubtedly and inevitably pay the price for our political illiteracy.

Sixth, the campaign against terrorism is really a struggle for hearts and minds. This is nothing new. It is proven and basic counter-terrorism doctrine. It was proven on the Malaysian terrorism battlefield in the fifties, where the very term "hearts and minds" was first coined. It has been proven over and over again in every counter-terrorism war since the beginning of modern times.

Seventh, however noble a cause may be, nothing, nothing, can legitimise or lend respectability to terror. Any organisation, any movement, any state that seeks to achieve its goals through violence against innocent men, women and children must be condemned without equivocation, and confronted without reservation. Islam itself forbids this act. The Holy Quran is unequivocal in its condemnation of suicide in any form. Muslims the world over are crystal clear on this. It is only the the Al-Qaeda, its associates and the terrorists it inspires, who have chosen to debase and distort the teachings of Islam for their own ends.

The final point I would like to make is that we must get serious in our campaign against international terrorism. Let me repeat, we must get serious.

Some of my friends here might ask, are we not already serious enough? Have we not mounted a global campaign that embraces all the six continents, the seas in between, and the skies above them? Whatever the limitations, are we not scouring for intelligence? Have we not strengthened surveillance of people and goods on our borders and within our territories? Are we not doing our best to sever the flow of funds to the terrorists?

Yes, we are doing all these things. But we are still not serious enough. We are not serious enough because some of us are loath to address the factors that do not justify terrorism but that are driving and fuelling terrorism. Or if we do so, we are highly selective. We highlight the factors that suit our interests and conform with our prejudices. We refuse to even discuss the factors that might associate our own actions with the problem, however remotely, or those factors that conflict with our perceived self-interest. Instead, we all too often seek to discredit those who call for a close look at the underlying forces that drive those to commit such monstrous acts.

It is time for us to get truly and really serious.

We must be brave enough, level headed enough, to address the issues that are being exploited by the Al-Qaeda, the Al-Qaeda network and the Al-Qaeda inspired terrorists to gain sympathy and support. There is no other way we can eliminate the threat.

No doctor can cure a disease by merely treating its symptoms. We must identify the cause, and neutralise it. This does not mean we must capitulate and give in. Far from it. But if the terrorist organisation is strong and grows resilient because it is riding on causes that resonate strongly among the people, like poverty or oppression, we must act on those causes. If a terrorist organisation espouses a cause that is legitimate in international law, like a struggle against illegal occupation, surely individual states and the international community have a responsibility to attend conscientiously to the issue. If terrorism flourishes because religious teachings are being corrupted to preach militancy and the massacre of innocent civilians, surely we must act against this blasphemy committed in the name of God.

It truly is time to get absolutely serious. There is no other option.