

## TERRORISM WILL STILL BE A THREAT

Brigitte Nacos



BRIGITTE NACOS is a professor of political science at Columbia University, an expert in terrorism issues, and has authored the books 'Mass Mediated Terrorism: The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism' (2002), and 'Fueling Our Fears: Stereotyping, Media Coverage, and Public Opinion of Muslim Americans' (2006)

*RJ Today we see that although society provides a lot of services in the security sector the spread of information technology has nevertheless led to an increase in fear — there are now a lot of phobias that travel very quickly across society and often become an instrument of manipulation. In your opinion, do mass fears — for example, the fear of terrorism — determine our political, economic, and social life?*

You are quite right that information now travels much faster than it did in the past and on a much more global scale; but unfortunately this has not led to people understanding each other better, rather it may have emphasized more people's perception of external danger and of others as being different. If you look at the

world today everywhere you see security forces. Look at the United States: we had a holiday (Thanksgiving) and during the week before it traveling was slowed terribly, with controversy over the much more intensive security checks put in place at airports due to heightened fears of terrorism. This is a good example where private life has been affected by the fears that are, in my view, overblown. But also collective life, the activities of governments and their policies are also very much affected by such fears, and it is in many ways alleged fear, or government-induced fear, that effectively directs government policy.

*RJ Fear has traditionally been attributed to the totalitarian state. But do people in democracies fear less? Is there any correlation between fear and a society's political organization?*

Clearly in a totalitarian regime, like Hitler's Germany or Stalin's regime, people who disagree are usually targeted and thus fearful of being persecuted. This kind of fear is very strong in an authoritarian regime and even more so in

move to communism and socialism. **If you look now, the recession in the United States has led to demagogues, again particularly in the radio and also within the so-called Tea Party movement, doing what demagogues do best — positioning themselves on the inside while they describe a host of enemies and threats that surround them.**

Right now these demagogues charge that Obama and indeed all liberals are in a truce with communists and socialists, and that they are unpatriotic. These things happen particularly in times of economic difficulty, but as we saw in the wake of 9/11, are not exclusive to them. After the trauma of 9/11 people were legitimately fearful, but fears can nevertheless be used by governments to pursue policies that may otherwise not be publicly favored. In Russia, since the attacks that occurred in the subway system or the takeover of the Moscow theatre in 2002, it is now clear that it is much easier for the government to intensify military measures in Chechnya, or wherever the threat may be, than if there had never been such attacks. And for those reasons it is always more useful to

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a totalitarian regime. But that does not mean that fear is never a factor in the public and political life of democracies. The propaganda of fear is going to be used by all kinds of people in different situations. In America during the Depression of the 1930's, you had demagogues who used the radio to spread fears of even worse economic failure in order to justify a

continue emphasizing the fear of repeated attack.

*RJ How does the fear of a terrorist attack change the nature of a democratic state? Does it make democracy less democratic?*

That's what the terrorists want but clearly civil liberties are very fundamental to democracy. And

when you have a real terror threat and it's undeniable — it's in Russia, it's in Western Europe in particular, it's in the United States — when you have an authoritarian system there's not much problem in tightening security even at the expense of taking rights away from citizens. But in democracies it is much more difficult because one must respect citizens' rights — freedom of the press, freedom of movement, freedom of expression, and the right to privacy — while at the same time make sure that citizens are secure. So there is always this kind of difficulty in balancing the right to certain civil liberties and security.

**RJ** *Every state has its own political fears, some fear terrorism while others fear a loss of civil liberties. In your opinion, do these fears present an obstacle for the state or, on the contrary, is fear something that can unite people and serve as a positive factor for the future of the state in the global community?*

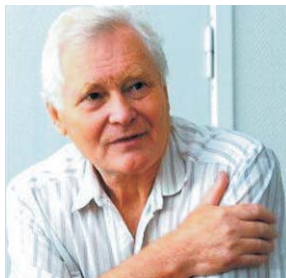
I think that **at this point the majority of fears are against globalization, as countries try to recede a little further from the world scene within their secure and protected borders.** On the other hand, fears that take on a global dimension, for example the fear of terrorism or weapons of mass destruction, do give an opportunity to move nations closer together. Take Iran, for example. If Iran really has missiles that can reach Russia and Western Europe, and on top of that has nuclear material, then there may be a common interest among many nations of the world to do something about it. Similarly, North Korea sits in the backyard of Russia and China, and is of concern to the US because of the troops they have stationed in South Korea. In these examples, I think the fear of something happening and affecting the whole world is positive if it can bring not people but political elites together.

**RJ** *Which mass fears do you think will determine the coming decade?*

I don't think it's a matter of just one fear. I think that because of the recession and the economic difficulties and the financial crisis of the markets there will be a big fear of losing one's economic strength, which might very well work against further globalization. I think that weapons of mass destruction will continue to be the source of great fear in many parts of the world. For example, the Arabs are very fearful of Iran developing more nuclear weapons. Terrorism will no doubt be a major cause of future fear as well. The biggest worry is that any of these more legitimate causes for fear can and perhaps will be used and manipulated by political actors to pursue their own policies and agendas. ■

*Brigitte Nacos was speaking with Yulia Nesterova*

## ISSUES OF ADAPTATION



SERGEI KARA-MURZA is a professor of political science, a journalist, and a member of the Russian Union of Writers. Author of a number of books, including *The Power of Manipulation* (2009), and *Russia Targeted: Threats to the Russian Civilization* (2010).

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Sociologists have always studied fear for it provides an important profile that says a lot about a variety of social processes. Existential fears are always present, like the fear of death, private life, or dear people. During times of stability in the USSR, these fears were most pronounced. Between the late 1980's and early 1990's, social fears became prominent. Fears that were previously unknown to the public — the fear of unemployment, unsecured old age, crime, ethnic violence, and even state-induced violence — all spread rapidly during this period. After all, when did we first see a truncheon in Moscow? In May 1989. People never saw it before because there was never the fear that it would be used against them. All these social fears materialized at a later stage.

There are realistic fears that allow one to adjust his course of action; these are positive fears. However, they often tend to be transformed into irrational and neurotic fears when some threats are exaggerated and others unaccounted for. Whenever such a mechanism of adaptation to the environment is deformed it becomes dysfunctional and ultimately makes a person weaker and vulnerable.

The process of global-

ization has brought with it a set of new fears. It is clear that when there was a secure national state, Foreign Ministry, customs, and the security of one's own cultural space, people felt well protected. But globalization has taken away this feeling of security, and as a result has provoked a surge of ethnic consciousness. **Nationalism has grown stronger in response to globalization; and this response is a painful one.**

Many modern fears can be directly connected to globalization. Take the American tragedy of September 11. It has since led to several prohibitions, banned films and songs, and has forced people to surrender many of their rights that they once regarded as inalienable. And all of these concessions have been agreed to out of fear. People are even beginning to accept proposals by intellectuals to legalize torture. Could this have ever been imagined before? Americans were once proud that such things were unthinkable in their land, that there is a sacred right for the body and its absolute inviolability. What is going on now represents drastic change. And such changes are plenty. Right now, people who find themselves in disasters value security and order more than the principles of their own democracy. ■