

Who Owns Terror? The Diplomacy of Hope

By Newton Bowles

Notes for Speech by Newton Bowles
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Good afternoon, friends. As we used to say it is great to shake hands with the old faces. You may be wondering how I am going to handle the ambivalent subject of my talk--my twin towers, terror and hope. You know that I come from a China missionary background so you will expect some evangelic declaration of faith. Of course, you will get that, tinged by my father's Irish humour ("Faith is believing what you know is not true"). And now we pin our faith on science, on the genetic exploration that will eventually eradicate the naughty genes that makes us do bad things.

I get the BBC world news every day in Manhattan, and recently I heard the BBC interview a California biologist who had succeeded in reversing the time-clock in the brains of old rats. His old rats had become young and frisky. This scientist told the BBC that he had telephoned his son, a computer whiz, living in New York. His son was truly impressed and said: "Great, Dad. That is the first stage. Be sure to tell me when you have turned old men into young rats." Science marches on.

Three weeks ago, in Manhattan, my telephone spoke. It was the gentle voice of Mary Edwards, the new queen of the Group of 78. What are you going to talk about, she asked. We are putting out a note about the luncheon, and we need the subject of your talk. I had no idea what I would be saying, but off the top of my head I said, well, how does this sound:

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Where was I around 9 o'clock on the morning of September 11? I was in bed sound asleep. I had been working all night, until 5 in the morning. This was a habit I had got into while writing my book last year. That fateful morning I was awakened by the telephone. It was my sister in Windsor, Ontario. She said that on her TV she had just seen a plane flying into the World Trade Tower. Another Hollywood thing, I thought, and

hung up. I turned on the coffee and the radio. It was real! And from my mid-town terrace, I could see smoke billowing up. Then came the second plane. My phone rang again. My friend Jane living downtown had seen the whole disaster. She was frantic. "Don't panic," I said. "It is not the end of the world."

The timing of this terrorist attack was brilliant, coming just as the annual UN General Assembly was getting underway. But instead of panic, the attack brought everyone together. The very next day, a unanimous Security Council condemned the attack and affirmed the Charter right to self-defense, in effect a blanket endorsement of forceful reaction by the USA. This was followed on September 23 by a detailed Security Council resolution instructing all members of the UN to take specific action to apprehend terrorists, to freeze all funding of terror and to enact national legislation against terrorists. It was the USA, which traditionally has opposed UN intrusion into national affairs, that introduced this resolution. The General Assembly also gave formal support to the Security Council's action.

Decisions by the Security Council are binding on all members of the UN. All governments are required to report what they are doing within three months. By now, more than 150 countries have reported.

Never before has the UN seen such quick and unanimous action. I can't imagine that the terrorists wanted to bring the UN to life in this way.

You are all familiar with what followed -- the U.S. led action in Afghanistan, in Uzbekistan, in Georgia and in the Philippines. More on that later. Meantime, what about the UN?

For security reasons, important meetings were postponed. The general policy debate was put off from September to November. And the special session on Children was moved from September to May of this year. With terror in the air, Kofi Annan kept reminding us that basic problems remain, many identified in the UN goals for the Millennium: poverty, HIV/AIDS, the environment, maternal and child health, education. And to these goals, Kofi is adding the prevention of violent conflict.

So back to terror or terrorism. Going back over 30 years, altogether 12 treaties have been concluded on specific acts of terrorism: 4 on air travel, one on marine navigation, one on water-borne drilling rigs, one on diplomats, one on hostages, one on bombing, one on nuclear material, one on plastic explosives and one on financing terrorism. There is in the works another treaty to stop people from stealing nuclear weapons. A comprehensive treaty to tie all of these together is stuck because there is no agreement on what terrorism is. The Israeli-Palestinian tragedy is there. Nevertheless, these treaties are an important practical and legal context for Security Council action. The big batch of national reports to the Security Council is being used to advise governments on how to strengthen their controls of terrorism, of money laundering, trafficking in drugs and arms, and sharing information.

While the Security Council is following government performance, Kofi Annan has assembled a UN interagency group to focus the whole UN system on how to deal with terrorism.

International action against terrorism has a lot to do with UN intervention for human rights. You will remember that in 1998, Kofi Annan challenged the UN membership on its responsibility to do something in any country where human rights are grossly violated. This was in the Kosovo context when the Security Council was stuck on what to do. After that, to help break the Security Council deadlock, Canada convened an expert panel which has recommended an emphasis on UN responsibility rather than censorship and punishment.

On human rights, it is national governments that are responsible. But what about terrorists? Was any government responsible for September 11? What indeed is terrorism? What guidelines are there for the U.S.-led coalition?

You all know that there is a whole battery of human rights treaties, and that there are specific ways for the Human Rights Commission to see whether governments are honouring their commitments in these treaties. UN inspectors go snooping and governments write reports. (Professor Ann Bayefsky of York University has done the definitive study on this.) These treaties bespeak the moral conscience of our planet, a massive body of international law.

Besides the court of public opinion at the Human Rights Commission, there is emerging a judicial system to enforce these laws, beginning with the ad hoc War Crimes Tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda, the regional Human Rights Courts for the Americas and Europe, and the Permanent International Criminal Courts (the ICC). Sixty governments must ratify the Rome Statutes for the ICC to start working, and at last count 55 had done so. Even without the USA, the ICC will arrive this year. Its mandate covers genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Although the Rome Statute does not specifically mention terrorism, Mary Robinson thinks that a terrorist attack on innocent civilians is a crime against humanity, coming under the ICC. We must remember, however, that the ICC will have no retroactive jurisdiction, it can only deal with acts committed after it is born. It can't judge September 11.

At our meeting last September, the Group of 78 decided to ask the Canadian Government to advocate another ad hoc UN Tribunal, a new one on crimes of terror. No terror tribunal has been created, the U.S. is opposed because they want to try captives from Afghanistan in their own courts.

What else is happening at the UN? Peacekeeping is greatly strengthened with nearly 200 more professionals at Headquarters. The long winter in Cyprus is finally thawing. In Africa, wounds are healing in Sierra Leone; and fratricide between Ethiopia and Eritrea is on hold. The spoils of war still subvert peace in so-called Democratic Congo. UN midwifery is cutting the umbilical in Kosovo and East Timor, two amazing operations. Just this month, the U.S. has engaged the Security Council in the Israeli-Palestinian

tragedy. And wherever disaster strikes, from North Korea to the Sudan, the UN is called in to give humanitarian relief.

The Millennium goals for the UN are only two years old, but it seems like we are already in another time. Plus ça change. But these goals are not to be dismissed as just another P.R. exercise. In fact, taken together they tell us what the world, at its best, would like to do collectively through the UN: to secure peace, eradicate poverty, protect the environment, promote rights and democracy, protect the vulnerable. It is the nations, the government members of the UN, that have to do the work. The tiny UN secretariat can do only what governments enable it to do, which means money and a degree of autonomy. I hope you understand my shorthand.

Kofi Annan gave the current General Assembly a road map for these goals, but September 11 looked away. Now the Secretary-General is trying to structure the whole work of the UN around these goals. This year he has engaged his staff and outside experts in think sessions aimed at defining feasible action and priorities. Malloch Brown, who runs the UN Development Programme, has the lead in this, and he is being advised by Jeffrey Sachs of Harvard. We've got brains, but where is the brawn?

Very much to the point are two big conferences this year: one on financing for development held in Mexico just now, and the other on Sustainable Development to take place in South Africa in September. In our faltering way, we --the international we-- talk about helping our impoverished siblings, and these conferences are part of a continuing effort to turn talk into action. From the beginning the UN, that is the Mother UN in New York, was marginalized by putting the World Bank and the IMF outside the UN in Washington.

It is the founding governments that created and maintain this split. Attacking children is, I suppose, one way to get at the parents. It must mean something that these financial institutions have adopted the UN goals as their own.

So what is the role of the UN in all this? The main role is moral, to shove into our face the fact that the UN membership spends 20 times more on the military than on development aid. As the western world grows richer, development aid gets smaller. Canada's record here is a disgrace. Who is in charge? For aid to poor nations, the UN gets its hands on around \$5 billion a year, and this allows the UN to do its unique work on social issues--women, children, and population, among others. That much money is needed for HIV/AIDS alone.

You will want to know something about the UN in-house, the hired help under Kofi Annan. The basic funding of the UN is now more comfortable since the U.S. has paid most of its current dues and about two-thirds of its outstanding dues. There is a little more money in the UN pocket, and this enables the UN budget to go up a little for the first time in years. At the same time, donors have slashed \$75 million from the UN budget for next year. This would not be much except for the fact that the decision to cut comes along with the instruction not to do some useful squeezing, e.g., getting rid of

incompetent political appointments. All this in the name of reform. Although the UN Secretariat is tiny compared to governments, yet there is always room for improvement. Our Louise Fréchette, Kofi's deputy, has the thankless job of tidying up the house. Kofi will present a new reform plan to the next General Assembly.

I have put off as long as I could that question: Who owns terror? --and how the U.S.-led coalition is addressing the question. The U.S. knows that it can't handle terrorism alone. Does this mean a more serious embrace of the UN? The signals are mixed, but the weather is much better. After September 11, the U.S. went immediately to the Security Council and got a green light for whatever. After many hostile years, the U.S. is on the way to paying up its dues. The U.S. has turned to the Security Council in the desperate Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And President Bush has announced a \$5 billion increase in U.S. financing for development.

But on the disarmament front, it looks like go-it-alone. The White House has asked for nearly \$50 billion more for "defense." While the President has pledged a big reduction in nuclear weapons, at the same time he is pushing ahead with Star Wars, so-called missile defense, which could well be the first phase for putting weapons in space. Then comes a plan from the Pentagon for reviving reliance on nuclear weapons, discussing seven potential enemy states (including China and Russia) and the creation of so-called tactical nuclear bombs, little ones to use in battle. Only a discussion paper, says Washington. How can sane people think this way?

As for terrorism, there seems to be no clear strategy beyond the initial knee-jerk reaction--tightening up security at home and along the borders, and going after the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. So far the emphasis has been on military action, with little attention to understanding where terror comes from and why terrorists are attacking the U.S. and its citizens. President Bush's talk about the "axis of evil" may have been intended for his domestic audience --after all, he is already running for re-election-- but it gave bad vibes internationally.

So where are we? The UN is no worse off than it was before President Bush. The U.S. has neither abandoned the UN nor embraced it. UN funding is better. The future lies ahead.

Who owns terror? We are inured to the fact of State terror. Long ago Hannah Arendt observed that totalitarian regimes held on through terror, psychological and physical. Terror is how wicked politicians gain and maintain power. Terror makes war, war on others, war on your own. We see it everywhere. Do I need to name names?

If Mary Robinson is right, that terrorist attacks on innocent civilians are crimes against humanity, who shall cast the first stone? Today's wars are wars against civilians, five million dead in the last decade including two million children. So much for state terror. But September 11 was stateless terror, it looks to be anarchic, ubiquitous, unpredictable. And why? We have clues, we can guess, but we can't understand the intensity of this

hatred, nor can we understand suicide as a weapon. It is a new kind of crime for which we have no explanation.

In this dark world, we see the truly noble peacemaking and humanitarian work of the United Nations. We can take pride and comfort in the fact that one of our own, Nigel Fisher, is in charge of the entire humanitarian program in Afghanistan. You would be astonished to know what remarkable work is being done even now, not only in food and medicine, but also in getting education started in thousands of communities. Dr. Sima Samar, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Women's Affairs in Kabul, was honoured in Canada by Warren Allmand's Centre for Human Rights and Democracy. An international jury chose her for the John Humphrey Freedom Award.

As for me, last year, instead of my annual round-up on the UN, I did a retrospective analysis of the UN since the Cold War. This is my book, *The Diplomacy of Hope*, published by UNAC in collaboration with the World Federation of UN Associations. The book has gone to all UN Associations around the world and to all Canadian diplomatic missions. In it I try to give a full and balanced account of UN achievement and failures. I have written in the tone of "letters home," to reach out to anyone interested in the big world.

And now, I continue to do what I can for UNICEF. This year I have begun an exploration of contemporary experience in recovery from war, the process of healing, both for individuals and for societies. For some time, UNICEF and others have been trying to help victims of war, children and families, get back to some sort of normal life. This has to be done in their national setting. Wounded nations need to heal. This is the main reason for Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, not to seek closure as in judicial prosecution but rather to start the healing process. There have been more than 20 Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, and there is certainly need for more. The thousands of individual witnesses before these Commissions also need personal recovery. As I have been studying what has been done to innocents, young and old, I have been stretched beyond imagining, confronting the face of evil. Just as incomprehensible to me has been the capacity to survive, to accept, to reconcile, to move on.

Children, indeed all of us, need to belong, to feel safe in our own world. In their classic study of children during the blitz of London, Anna Freud and Dorothy Burglingham found that children were at ease, amidst bombs and fire, as long as they were with a loving parent or another caring person. Growing up in the midst of violence in China, I had the same experience. I was not afraid. It is not sentimental nonsense to say that the cure for terror is love.