

PSYCHOLOGISTS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

How Globalization Spurs Terrorism

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Twenty-first century Islamic terrorism is in large part a product of a *fractured globalization* that poses profound threats to the collective identity of Muslims. As sudden contact between groups with little previous history of contact increases through globalization, fundamentalists feel greater identity threat, and some react violently to the perceived threat of their extinction. As economic forces push people to become part of larger and larger groups, psychological forces pull people toward the local. As global wealth increases, wealth disparities increase between the richest and the poorest. As communications expand around the world, identification with religious and ethnic ingroups becomes stronger. As trade barriers fall and national boundaries become less salient economically, identity barriers rise up.

To understand Islamic terrorism, we need to recognize the contrast between globalization as an ideal and the fractured globalization--with its enormous contradictions and threats--that is actually taking place instead. Fractured globalization is resulting in serious threats to some basic psychological needs, particularly in relation to collective identity. Globalization has brought about sudden contact between life forms, including different human groups, with little previous history of large-scale contact. One consequence of sudden contact is a rapid decline in diversity, both among animals and plants and among human cultures and languages (e.g., 60% of human languages have become extinct in the last 500 years). From the perspective of long-term evolutionary processes, Islamic terrorism is a (dysfunctional) defense mechanism adopted by groups who fear extinction.

Integral to fractured globalization is *The New Global American Dilemma*. The first American dilemma arose from contradictions between American rhetoric about freedom and American racial segregation practices at home. This dilemma was partially resolved through desegregation reform in the United States. Today's new global American dilemma arises from contradictions between American rhetoric on freedom and democracy around the world and American practices of supporting selected corrupt 'pro-American' dictatorships in Islamic countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia and Egypt)--practices that increase the likelihood of continued terrorism. Along with U.S. support, the 'oil curse' has enabled such dictatorships to persist in oil-producing countries, where oil revenues are used to buy the loyalty of the military and security apparatus, without the support of the indigenous population. The resolution of this dilemma is therefore a crucial part of the solution to Islamic terrorism.

Psychologists for Social Responsibility seeks to bring greater psychological knowledge and public awareness to the issues highlighted in this brief overview. For more information, please contact us at info@psysr.org. We encourage new PsySR members to join in these efforts. Media inquiries are also welcome.

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