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Gandhi vs. terrorism

Immediately after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the idea of taking a nonviolent stance in response to terrorism would have been dismissed out of hand. But now, after the invasion and occupation of two Muslim countries by the U.S. military, the loss of thousands of American soldiers and tens of thousands of innocent Afghans and Iraqis, and the start of a global jihadi war that seems unending, virtually any alternative seems worth considering. It is in this context that various forms of less militant response, including the methods of conflict resolution adopted by India's nationalist leader, Mohandas Gandhi, deserve a second look.

Like us, Gandhi had to deal with terrorism, and his responses show that he was a tough-minded realist. I say this

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knowing that this image of Gandhi is quite different from what most Westerners have in mind when they think of him. The popular view in Europe and the United States is the one a circle of Western pacifists writing in the 1920s promoted – the image of Gandhi as a saint.

In a 1921 lecture on "Who is the Greatest Man in the World Today?" John Haynes Holmes, the pastor of New York City's largest liberal congregation, extolled not Lenin or Woodrow Wilson or Sun Yat-sen but someone whom most of the crowd thronging the hall that day had never heard of – Mohandas Gandhi.¹ Holmes, who was later credited with being the West's discoverer of Gandhi, described him as his "seer and saint."²

In fact, the term 'Mahatma,' or 'great soul,' which is often appended to Gandhi's name, probably came not from admirers in India but from the West. Be-

1 John Haynes Holmes, "Who is the Greatest Man in the World Today?" a pamphlet published in 1921 and reprinted in Charles Chatfield, ed., *The Americanization of Gandhi: Images of the Mahatma* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1976), 98.

2 John Haynes Holmes, *My Gandhi* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), 9.

fore the Indian philosopher Rabindranath Tagore used the term in his letter welcoming Gandhi to India in 1914, members of an American and European mystical movement, the Theosophists, had applied this name to Gandhi. Most likely, they were the ones who conveyed it to Tagore, and since then the term has persisted, even though it was Westerners rather than Indians who first regarded Gandhi in such a saintly mien.

In India, Gandhi was seen as a nationalist leader who, though greatly revered, was very much a politician. Though Gandhi was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize on several occasions, the selection committee hesitated, thinking that the choice of an activist rather than an idealist would stoke political controversies. Gandhi was indeed in the midst of political battle, and in the process he had to address the violence of both his side and the opponents, acts that looked very much like the terrorism of today.

India was on the verge of a violent confrontation with Britain when, in 1915, Gandhi was brought into India's independence movement from South Africa, where as a lawyer he had been a leader in the struggle for social equality for immigrant Indians. In India, as in South Africa, the British had overwhelming military superiority and were not afraid to use it. In 1919, in the North Indian city of Amritsar, an irate British brigadier-general slaughtered almost four hundred Indians who had come to the plaza of Jallianwala Bagh to protest peacefully.

But the nationalist side was countering with violence of its own. In Bengal, Subhas Chandra Bose organized an Indian National Army, and, in Punjab, leaders of the Ghadar movement – supported by immigrant Punjabis in California – plotted a violent revolution that anticipated boatloads of weapons and revolutionaries transported to India from the United

States. These Indian anarchists and militant Hindi nationalists saw violence as the only solution to break the power of the British over India.

Gandhi's views about violent struggle were sharpened in response to Indian activists who had defended a terrorist attack on a British official. The incident occurred in London in 1909, shortly before Gandhi arrived there to lobby the British Parliament on behalf of South African Indian immigrants. An Indian student in London, Madan Lal Dhingra, had attacked an official in Britain's India office, Sir William H. Curzon-Wylie, in protest against Britain's colonial control over India. At a formal function, Dhingra pulled out a gun and, at close range, fired five shots in his face. The British official died on the spot. Dhingra was immediately apprehended by the police; when people in the crowd called him a murderer, he said that he was only fighting for India's freedom.

Several weeks after Gandhi arrived in London, he was asked to debate this issue of violence with several of London's expatriate Indian nationalists. His chief opponent was Vinayak Savarkar, a militant Hindu who would later found the political movement known as the Hindu Mahasabha, a precursor to the present-day Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party. At the time of the 1909 assassination Savarkar was reputed to have supplied the weapons and ammunition for the act, and to have instructed the ardent Hindu assassin in what to say in his final statement as he was led to the gallows. The young killer said that he was "prepared to die, glorying in martyrdom."³

³ *Indian Sociologist*, September 1909, quoted in James D. Hunt, *Gandhi in London* (New Delhi: Promilla and Co., Publishers, 1973), 134. My thanks to Lloyd Rudolph for reminding me of this incident.

Shortly before the debate, Gandhi wrote to a friend that in London he had met practically no Indian who believed “India can ever become free without resorting to violence.”⁴ He described the position of the militant activists as one in which terrorism would precede a general revolution: Their plans were first to “assassinate a few Englishmen and strike terror,” after which “a few men who will have been armed will fight openly.” Then, they calculated, eventually they might have to lose “a quarter of a million men, more or less,” but the militant Indian nationalists thought this effort at guerilla warfare would “defeat the English” and “regain our land.”⁵

During the debate, Gandhi challenged the logic of the militants on the grounds of political realism. They could hardly expect to defeat the might of the British military through sporadic acts of terrorism and guerilla warfare. More important, however, was the effect that violent tactics would have on the emerging Indian nationalist movement. He feared that the methods they used to combat the British would become part of India’s national character.

Several weeks later Gandhi was still thinking about these things as he boarded a steamship to return to South Africa. He penned his response to the Indian activists in London in the form of a book. In a preliminary way, this essay, which Gandhi wrote hurriedly on the

4 Gandhi’s letter to Amphill, October 30, in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 9 (Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1958), 509.

5 Mohandas Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj, or, Indian Home Rule*, 2nd ed. (Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House, 1938; originally published in 1910), 69.

boat to Durban in 1909 (writing first with one hand and then the other to avoid getting cramps), set forth an approach to conflict resolution that he would pursue the rest of his life. The book, *Hind Swaraj, or, Indian Home Rule*, went to some lengths to describe both the goals of India’s emerging independence movement and the appropriate methods to achieve it. He agreed with the Indian radicals in London that Britain should have no place in ruling India and exploiting its economy. Moreover, he thought that India should not try to emulate the materialism of Western civilization, which he described as a kind of “sickness.”

The thrust of the book, however, was to counter terrorism. Gandhi sketched out a nonviolent approach, beginning with an examination of the nature of conflict. He insisted on looking beyond a specific clash between individuals to the larger issues for which they were fighting. Every conflict, Gandhi reasoned, was a contestation on two levels – between persons and between principles. Behind every fighter was the issue for which the fighter was fighting. Every fight, Gandhi explained in a later essay, was on some level an encounter between differing “angles of vision” illuminating the same truth.⁶

It was this difference in positions – sometimes even in worldviews – that needed to be resolved in order for a fight to be finished and the fighters reconciled. In that sense Gandhi’s methods were more than a way of confronting an enemy; they were a way of dealing with conflict itself. For this reason he grew

6 Gandhi, writing in *Young India*, September 23, 1926. I explore Gandhi’s ideas further in my book, *Gandhi’s Way: A Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

unhappy with the label, 'passive resistance,' that had been attached to the methods used by his protest movement in South Africa. There was nothing passive about it – in fact, Gandhi had led the movement into stormy confrontations with government authorities – and it was more than just resistance. It was also a way of searching for what was right and standing up for it, of speaking truth to power.

In 1906 Gandhi decided to find a new term for his method of engaging in conflict. He invited readers of his journal, *Indian Opinion*, to offer suggestions, and he offered a book prize for the winning entry. The one that most intrigued him came from his own cousin, Maganlal, which Gandhi refined into the term, *satyagraha*. The neologism is a conjunct of two Sanskrit words, *satya*, 'truth,' and *agraha*, 'to grasp firmly.' Hence it could be translated as 'grasping onto truth,' or as Gandhi liked to call it, "truth force."

What Gandhi found appealing about the winning phrase was its focus on truth. Gandhi reasoned that no one possesses a complete view of it. The very existence of a conflict indicates a deep difference over what is right. The first task of a conflict, then, is to try to see the conflict from both sides of an issue. This requires an effort to understand an opponent's position as well as one's own – or, as former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara advised in the documentary film *The Fog of War*, "Empathize with the enemy."

The ability to cast an empathetic eye was central to Gandhi's view of conflict. It made it possible to imagine a solution that both sides could accept, at least in part – though Gandhi also recognized that sometimes the other side had very little worth respecting. In his campaign for the British to 'quit India,' for instance, he regarded the only righteous

place for the British to be was Britain. Yet at the same time he openly appreciated the many positive things that British rule had brought to the Indian subcontinent, from roads to administrative offices.

After a solution was imagined, the second stage of a struggle was to achieve it. This meant fighting – but in a way that was consistent with the solution itself. Gandhi adamantly rejected the notion that the goal justifies the means. Gandhi argued that the ends and the means were ultimately the same. If you fought violently you would establish a pattern of violence that would be part of any solution to the conflict, no matter how noble it was supposed to be. Even if terrorists were successful in ousting the British from India, Gandhi asked, "Who will then rule in their place?" His answer was that it would be the ones who had killed in order to liberate India, adding, "India can gain nothing from the rule of murderers."⁷

A struggle could be forceful – often it would begin with a demonstration and "a refusal to cooperate with anything humiliating." But it could not be violent, Gandhi reasoned, for these destructive means would negate any positive benefits of a struggle's victory. If a fight is waged in the right way it could enlarge one's vision of the truth and enhance one's character in the process. What Gandhi disdained was the notion that one had to stoop to the lowest levels of human demeanor in fighting for something worthwhile.

This brings us to the way that Gandhi would respond to terrorism. To begin with, Gandhi insisted on some kind of response. He never recommended do-

⁷ *Indian Sociologist*, September 1909, quoted in Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, 134.

ing nothing at all. “Inaction at a time of conflagration is inexcusable,” he once wrote.⁸ He regarded cowardice as beneath contempt. Fighting – if it is non-violent – is “never demoralizing,” Gandhi said, while “cowardice always is.”⁹ And perhaps Gandhi’s most memorable statement against a tepid response: “Where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence.”¹⁰

Occasionally violence does indeed seem to be the only response available. Gandhi provided some examples. One was the mad dog. On confronting a dog with rabies, one must stop it by any means possible, including maiming or killing it.¹¹ Another case that Gandhi offered was a brutal rapist caught in the act. To do nothing in that situation, Gandhi said, makes the observer “a partner in violence.” Hence violence could be used to counter it. Gandhi thus concluded, “Heroic violence is less sinful than cowardly nonviolence.”¹²

By extension, one could imagine Gandhi justifying an act of violence to halt an act of terrorism in progress. If Gandhi had been sitting next to the suicide bomber in the London subway during the 2005 attack, for instance, he would have been justified in wrestling the man to the floor and subduing him. If no other means were available than a physical assault – even one that led to the man’s death – it would have been preferable to the awful event that transpired when the bomb exploded.

8 *Harijan*, April 7, 1946.

9 *Young India*, October 31, 1929.

10 *Young India*, August 11, 1920.

11 Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 14, 505.

12 Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 51, 17.

Responding to terrorism after the fact, however, is quite a different matter. What Gandhi argued in *Hind Swaraj* was that violence never works as a response to violence. It usually generates more violence as a result, and precipitates a seemingly endless litany of tit-for-tat militant engagements.

Gandhi was adamantly opposed to the political positions that justified terrorism, but he was remarkably lenient toward the terrorists themselves. In the case of the assassination that occurred when Gandhi was in London in 1909, he did not blame Dhingra, the assassin of Curzon-Wyllie. He said that Dhingra as a person was not the main problem. Rather, Gandhi said, he was like a drunkard, in the grip of “a mad idea.”¹³

The difficulty was the “mad idea,” not the terrorists. Though he might have justified killing them if he had caught them in the act, after their tragic mission was over, Gandhi’s attitude toward those who carried out terrorist acts was more of pity than of revenge. He would not let them go free, of course, but he treated them as misguided soldiers rather than as monsters.

Moreover, Gandhi thought it quite possible that the ideas for which the violent activists were fighting could be worthy ones. In the case of Dhingra and the Indian militants in 1909, for instance, they were championing a cause that Gandhi himself affirmed. Hence it would be an enormous mistake – foolish, from a Gandhian point of view – to fixate on terrorist acts solely as deviant behavior without taking seriously the causes for which these passionate soldiers were laboring.

A Gandhian strategy for confronting terrorism, therefore, would consist of the following:

13 *Indian Sociologist*, September 1909, quoted in Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, 134.

Stop an act of violence in its tracks. The effort to do so should be nonviolent but forceful. Gandhi made a distinction between detentive force – the use of physical control in order to halt violence in progress – and coercive force. The latter is meant to intimidate and destroy, and hinders a Gandhian fight aimed at a resolution of principles at stake.

Address the issues behind the terrorism. To focus solely on acts of terrorism, Gandhi argued, would be like being concerned with weapons in an effort to stop the spread of racial hatred. Gandhi thought the sensible approach would be to confront the ideas and alleviate the conditions that motivated people to undertake such desperate operations in the first place.

Maintain the moral high ground. A bellicose stance, Gandhi thought, debased those who adopted it. A violent posture adopted by public authorities could lead to a civil order based on coercion. For this reason Gandhi insisted on means consistent with the moral goals of those engaged in the conflict.

These are worthy principles, but do they work? This question is often raised about nonviolent methods as a response to terrorism – as if the violent ones have been so effective. In Israel, a harsh response to Palestinian violence has often led to a surge of support for Hamas and an increase in terrorist violence. The U.S. responses to jihadi movements after the September 11 attacks have not diminished support for the movements nor reduced the number of terrorist incidents worldwide. Militant responses to terrorism do not possess a particularly good record of success.

Yet there is a recent example of a successful end to terrorism that was forged through nonviolent means. This is the

case of Northern Ireland, a region plagued by violence for decades.

The troubles of Northern Ireland could be traced back to the British establishment of the Ulster Plantation in 1610, though the most recent round of violence began after a free Irish state was established in 1921. Catholics in the Northern Ireland counties felt marginalized in what they claimed to be Irish territory. Protestants feared they would become overwhelmed and banished from what they regarded as a part of Britain.

Violence erupted in the summer of 1969 in the Bogside area of the city of Londonderry. Following the clash, Protestants revived an old militia, the Ulster Volunteer Force, and militant Catholics created a ‘provisional’ version of the Irish Republican Army that would be more militant than the old IRA.

In 1971, Northern Ireland officials adopted a preemptive stance and began rounding up Catholic activists whom they regarded as potential terrorists. The activists were detained without charges. Within hours, rioting and shooting broke out in the Catholic neighborhoods of Belfast and adjacent towns. The government, rather than retreating from its hard line, pressed on, declaring a war against terrorism. The suspects were beaten and tortured in an attempt to elicit information. They were forced to lie spread-eagle on the floor with hoods over their heads, and subjected to disorienting electronic sounds.

The government’s attempt to end the violence by harshly treating those it suspected of perpetrating violence backfired. The Catholic community united solidly behind the insurgency, and the violence mounted. Later the Home Minister who sanctioned the crackdown admitted that the hard-line approach was

“by almost universal consent an unmitigated disaster.”

The violence of the early 1970s came to a head on what came to be called ‘Bloody Sunday,’ when a peaceful protest march against the internment of Catholic activists turned ugly. British troops fired on the crowd, killing thirteen.

For over twenty years the violence continued. Tit-for-tat acts of terrorism became a routine affair. The British embassy in Dublin was burned, British soldiers were attacked, police stations were bombed, and individual Catholics and Protestants were captured by opposing sides and sometimes hideously tortured and killed.

In 1988 an internal dialogue began to take place within the Catholic side between a moderate leader, John Hume, and the activist leader, Gerry Adams. In 1995, former U.S. Senator George Mitchell was invited to Northern Ireland to help broker the peace talks. Initially they were unsuccessful, but then Mitchell returned for eight months of intensive negotiations. The talks involved members of Irish and British governments and eight political parties on both Catholic and Protestant sides of the Northern Irish divide. They reached an agreement on April 10, 1998 – a day that happened to be Good Friday, the Christian holiday that precedes Easter.

The Good Friday Agreement is a remarkable document. It attempted to provide structural resolutions to several different problems at the same time. To respond to the public mistrust and insecurity brought on by years of violence, the Agreement set up Human Rights and Equality Commissions. It called for an early release of political prisoners, required the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, prescribed reforms of the criminal justice system

and the policies of police, and supplied funds to help the victims of violence. It also addressed the problem of balanced governance by setting up a parliament with proportional representation, an executive branch that guaranteed representation from both communities, and a consultative Civic Forum that allowed for community concerns to be expressed directly from the people. The Agreement also dealt with relations among the three key states involved – Ireland, Great Britain, and Northern Ireland – by establishing several councils and mediating bodies.

Prior to the Agreement, the British government and the paramilitary forces on both the Unionist and IRA sides had found themselves in a situation similar to many violent confrontations. Their positions had been staked out in extreme and uncompromising terms, and the methods used by all sides were so harsh as to be virtually unforgivable. Ultimately they were able to break through this impasse by employing several basic nonviolent techniques:

Seeing the other side’s point of view. When the British began to open lines of communication to the radical leaders on both sides, they began to break through the ‘we-they’ attitude that vexes most hostile confrontations.

Not responding to violence in kind. A series of ceasefires – including unilateral ceasefires by the IRA – were critical in helping to break the spiral of violence. Even as severe an incident as the Omagh terrorist bombing on August 15, 1998, did not elicit retaliatory attacks.

Letting moderate voices surface. Once the spiral of violence had been broken, and both sides no longer felt under siege, there was room for moderate voices to surface within the warring camps.

Isolating radical voices. The peace negotiators did not try to change what could

not be changed. Hence they did not waste time in trying to reason with the militant Protestant leader, Reverend Ian Paisley, who had opted out of the process.

Setting up channels of communication. They involved an outsider – Senator Mitchell – to play a mediating role, and set up impartial frameworks of communication for the two sides, which had been deeply mistrustful of one another.

Peace in Northern Ireland was not inevitable, and there is no assurance that the agreement will last forever. Violence may again return to that troubled area of Ireland. Yet for a time the bombs have been silenced. At least in one case in recent political history terrorism has come to an end – through nonviolent means.

It is reasonable to ask whether the approach taken in Northern Ireland could work in other situations. Could it work in Kashmir, for instance, a region that is also claimed by two religious communities backed by powerful governments? It would not take a huge stretch of imagination to think that India and Pakistan could join in a settlement surprisingly similar to the Good Friday Agreement. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is more complex, but like Northern Ireland it is essentially a conflict over territory in which both sides have a moral and political claim. Since the Oslo Agreement in 1993 a negotiated settlement in the region has seemed a realistic though still elusive possibility.

But what about the global jihadi war? This is the global conflict that President George W. Bush designated “the war on terror” shortly after September 11, 2001, and relabeled “the struggle against radical Islam” in July 2005. Osama bin Laden enunciated his own proclamation of this war in a fatwa against the United States in 1996. Bin Laden called on Muslims to

join him in “correcting what had happened to the Islamic world in general” since the end of the Ottoman Empire. The aim, according to bin Laden, was “to return to the people their own rights, particularly after the large damages and the great aggression on the life and the religion of the people.”¹⁴

Groups sharing an Al Qaeda perspective have attacked the very centers of Western power in New York, Madrid, and London, but their struggle is not in any simple sense about territory. It is a war without a frontline and without clear geographic lines of control. On the jihadi side it is a war without a conventional army and without the apparatus of a political state. For that matter, the jihadi movement seems to be without much centralized control at all.

With no one clearly in charge, negotiation is a difficult affair. It is unlikely that U.S. officials would hike into the mountains of Pakistan to chat with bin Laden, if indeed he could be found. And even if there were such conversations, what would be the point? He has no real control over the policies of the Middle East and is in no position to negotiate a settlement of the underlying issues of Western influence that his fatwa describes. To acknowledge bin Laden as a representative of the Muslim people would be to magnify his importance and reward his terrorism with political legitimacy. The United States has already exaggerated his importance – and unwittingly enlarged his support within the Muslim world – by singling him out as the global enemy of the United States. Negotiations with renegade extremists like bin Laden would not achieve any

14 Osama bin Laden, “Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places,” first published in Arabic in *Al Quds Al Arabi*, a London-based newspaper, August 1996.

changes in underlying policy positions that would lessen tensions in the Middle East.

Behind the jihadi war is a conflict between ideas and worldviews. In saying this I do not mean to belittle the importance of the struggle, for ideas can have enormous power. But because the contest is between differing ways of perceiving the world and the relationship between political and moral order, the struggle has had a remarkably moralistic tone. The enemies are not really individuals as much as they are ways of thinking.

Both sides define their goal as freedom. On one side it is the liberty to choose a nation's own officials through democratic elections. On the other side it is liberation from outside influence and control. On both sides these positions have been magnified into a moral contest of such proportions that it has become a sacred struggle. The enemies have become cosmic foes. Large numbers of innocent people have been killed with moral indifference – or worse, with the self-righteous thinking that God is on one's side.

Is a nonviolent approach to conflict resolution relevant to the global jihadi war? Consider the guidelines that Gandhi enunciated in response to the terrorism of the Indian activists in London in 1909. They might be applied to the current situation in the following way:

Stop a situation of violence in its tracks.
The first rule of nonviolence is to stop an act of violence as it occurs – or better, to prevent it before it happens. Gandhi would have approved of efforts to capture those involved in acts of terrorism and bring them to justice, and he would have applauded attempts to ward off future terrorist assaults through the legal forms of surveillance and detection that have been adopted after September 11.

Even those measures that seem to be aimed only at giving the appearance of security have a certain utility, since they diminish the prime effects of terrorism – fear and intimidation. But even though Gandhi occasionally supported military action, including the British defense against Hitler in World War II, it is doubtful that he would have accepted large-scale military operations as a response to terrorist acts, especially if they left large numbers of casualties in their wake. Nor would he have approved of changes in the legal system that would deprive the public of its rights.

Address the issues behind the violence. The crucial part of nonviolent resolution is to look behind the violence at the issues that are at stake. Gandhi's goal was to form a resolution with the best features of both sides of a dispute. In the case of the global jihadi war, this would mean affirming the positive principles of both sides – though the 'sides' in this case are not only state and non-state organizations but also the concerned publics that stand behind them. Gandhi might have approved of the principles of both sides: the desire of many traditional Muslims in the Middle East to be free from American and European domination, and the expectation of those who hold modern social values that all societies should respect peoples of diverse cultures and be democratically governed. Since these goals are not necessarily incompatible, a resolution that accepts them both is conceivable.

Ultimately, tensions might not be fully resolved until there are significant changes in the political culture of Middle Eastern countries and dramatic reversals of the West's military and economic role in the Middle East. But in the meantime small steps can make a large difference. Any indication that either or both sides accept both sets of principles

would be a positive shift toward reconciling the underlying differences and diminishing the support for extremists' positions.

Maintain the moral high ground. As Gandhi remarked to the Indian activists in London who proposed a violent overthrow of British control of India, violence begets violence. Proclaiming a 'war on terrorism,' from Gandhi's point of view, is tantamount to sinking to the terrorists' level. The very idea of war suggests an absolutism of conflict, where reason and negotiation have no place and where opponents are enemies. Though violent extremists are indeed difficult opponents, and Gandhi would not expect one to negotiate with them, he would be mindful that the more important struggle is the one for public support. This support could shift either way, and it would be a tragic error – and perhaps a self-fulfilling prophecy – to regard potential supporters as enemies.

Mistreatment of those suspected of being involved in terrorist acts can also lead to a loss of public support. Gandhi urged that the assassin, Dhingra, be treated with caution but also with respect, as any suspect in a crime would be treated. Torture, from Gandhi's point of view, is ineffective not just because it rarely produces useful information but also because it corrupts the moral character of a society that allows it to be used. This was the point he made in *Hind Swaraj* when he stressed that the means of freeing India from British control should be consistent with the goals a free Indian society would want to achieve.

Many of these guidelines have been part of the public debate in the United States in the years following the September 11 attacks. Thus a nonviolent response to terrorism is already an element of political discourse. It is not a

new idea, but rather a strand of public thinking that deserves attention and, Gandhi might argue, respect. As a pragmatic idealist, Gandhi would be pleased to know that nonviolent approaches to terrorism were taken seriously, not only because they invariably were the right thing to do, but also because on more than one occasion they have worked.