

Governments are terrorists' best teachers

TERRORISTS have learned a lot from their opponents.

For terrorists, civilians are expendable. The same is true for governments at war. In World War II, large-scale attacks were made on civilian populations in London, Dresden, Tokyo and other cities.

Terrorists attack without a declaration of war. But so do governments. The United States military has been involved in numerous wars since 1945, such as the Korean and Vietnamese wars, not a single one of which was formally declared.

Terrorist groups try to instil in their members intense loyalty and a willingness to die for the cause. So



Forum By Brian Martin

do military forces, which award loyal troops who sacrifice their lives in battle with the highest honours. Terrorist leaders no doubt wish their members would follow orders as willingly.

The US, Russia, Britain, France, China, Israel, India and Pakistan

have nuclear weapons. The capacity to make chemical and biological weapons is widespread. There are some comparatively weak states, such as Iraq and North Korea, which also have or would like to have weapons of mass destruction. In their desire to acquire similar weapons, terrorists are following the example of countries with large and powerful military forces.

Terrorists use high-minded rhetoric about freedom and liberation to cloak their aggressive actions and their lies. So do governments. There is a long history of false pretexts for going to war. The most tragic part of this

process is the revenge cycle, with one side's revenge providing the excuse for the other's, as seen in the Israeli/Palestine conflict. The enemy is dehumanised to make it easier to justify attacks.

So what can we expect from an attack on Iraq? The example given to potential terrorists will be stark: "If you don't like what the other side is doing, just go ahead and attack, ignoring laws, civilians, and non-violent options."

We need to step outside the hall of mirrors in which terrorists and anti-terrorists are virtually indistinguishable. That means moving beyond revenge killing as the solution to killing.

There are many options, including fostering greater inter-cultural dialogue, supporting humanitarian efforts, reforming the international financial system to give greater support to the poor, and promoting non-violent action as a method of social change. These options have been overshadowed by the push towards war.

Unfortunately, the anti-terrorist campaign is making social action more difficult, thereby sowing the seeds for more violence, thereby justifying anti-terrorism, and so on. The challenge before us is to break this vicious cycle.

□ Dr Brian Martin is an associate professor at the University of Wollongong.