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THE WAR ON TERROR, 2001-PRESENT

I. ORIGINS OF AL QAEDA AND THE TERROR WAR

- A. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, partly to prevent it from sliding into the U.S. camp in the Cold War, partly to forestall the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. The Afghans resisted (with U.S. help, see 'B'); the Soviets responded brutally, killing one million Afghans and creating five million Afghan refugees, 1979-1989.
- B. The U.S. sent large covert aid to the Afghan anti-Soviet resistance, 1980-1989. At Pakistani urging U.S. aid flowed mainly to the most extreme Islamists among the seven mujahideen groups resisting the Soviets, especially to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's vicious Hisb-e-Islami group. Osama Bin Laden formed Al Qaeda in Pakistan in the mid-1980s from Arabs who volunteered to aid the Afghans. Al Qaeda combined Egyptian followers of Egyptian Islamist ideas (Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb) with Saudi followers of Wahhabism, a hateful and xenophobic Saudi Islamic sect. Bin Laden's first target: the Soviet Union. His second target: the United States. His prime objective: to achieve the overthrow of secular and/or corrupt Arab regimes in Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. He believed that the U.S. propped up these regimes; ending U.S. support for them would ease their downfall.
- C. The Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in February 1989 but the U.S. continued to support violent resistance to the Najibullah communist regime it left behind. Najibullah fell in 1992.
- D. The U.S. walked away from Afghanistan after Najibullah's fall, making no effort to establish peace among the fractious mujahideen factions that overthrew Najibullah. These factions fell to fighting each other, 1992-1996, destroying much of what remained of Afghanistan. At one point Hekmatyar's bunch, annoyed at being out of power, shelled Kabul, destroying half the city.
- E. Islamic extremists in the Pakistani intelligence service (ISI) created the Taliban and pushed it to power in Afghanistan in 1996. The Afghan people generally welcomed it as the only answer to continued chaos.

The Taliban imposed cruel and fanatical rule on Afghanistan, 1996-2001. It also allowed Bin Laden's Al Qaeda to set up training bases in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda trained 20,000 fighters in these camps, then scattered them to the four corners of the world to conduct murder and mayhem against "infidels."
- F. Al Qaeda and its affiliates commenced a violent campaign of terror against the U.S. in the 1990s. Ramzy Youssef, a nephew of Al Qaeda leader Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, organized the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center and a 1994 failed attempt to destroy 11 airliners over the Pacific ocean. Al Qaeda then organized the August 1998 bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 212 Africans and 12 Americans; a failed January 1, 2000 attack on the Los Angeles airport and hotels in Jordan; the October 2000 bombing of the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen; and the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center. The U.S. struck back at Al Qaeda's Afghan bases with cruise missiles in August 1998 and finally moved to oust the Afghan Taliban regime that protected it in 2001. Most of the Al Qaeda leadership survived the Taliban's ouster by slipping into Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Provinces, where many still remain.
- G. Background factors contributing to the rise of Al Qaeda and to the danger it poses:
 - Failed states that cannot control their territory, such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Congo, and Lebanon (from 1970s-1980s) have grown in number. This has given terrorist groups places to locate. Al Qaeda now hides in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Somalia, which are semi-failed.

- By luck Al Qaeda commands great wealth--a first for a serious terrorist organization.
- Al Qaeda has highly skilled leadership, seen in Bin Laden and his associates. Al Qaeda achieved levels of discipline and tactical skill not seen before among terrorist organizations.
- Arab and Islamic hostility toward the United States rose during the decade before 2001. This gave Al Qaeda a friendly sea in which to swim. The roots of this hostility likely lie in three causes:
 - Saudi Arabia's export of its harsh and chauvinist version of Islam--Wahhabism--throughout the Mideast since 1962.
 - The new Arab satellite television media that appeared in the 1990s. This new Arab media is like the new U.S. media of the 1890s, when Pulitzer and Hearst fought for circulation by spreading sensational lies and chauvinism. For example: after 9/11/01 Al Jazeera, the main satellite news station, aired the claim that 4,000 Jews did not come to work at the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, and that no Jews died in its collapse. The Jews did it!!
 - The renewal of Israel-Palestinian fighting, September 29, 2000-present. The new Arab satellite TV stations give this fighting inflaming coverage. The Israel-Palestinian conflict has become highly salient throughout the Arab and Muslim world to due this fighting and the new Arab TV that covers it. This Arab TV casts the U.S. as the bad guy in the drama due to its large aid to Israel (some \$4.5 billion per year) while Israel exports settlers (400,000 since 1967) into Arab territories it occupied in the 1967 war. The U.S. supplies this aid unconditionally and thus in Arab eyes is a party to Israel's policies.
- The cost of making weapons of mass destruction has fallen, the expertise needed to make them has spread, and the number of states trying to make them has grown. Pakistan, Iran, North Korea and Libya--all friendly with terrorist groups--have joined the game. There is fear they will supply such weapons to terrorists if they build them.
- The collapse of the Soviet Union raised the risk of terrorists buying weapons of mass destruction, or the skills or materials to make them, from Russian sellers.

H. Why was the terror threat unforeseen?

- There is no powerful agency in Washington that could increase its budget by pointing to the terrorist threat. For example, the military doesn't address terrorists and so has little interest in pointing to the danger they pose. There was no "department of counterterror" whose budget depended on public concern about terror and would gladly sound the tocsin when the threat appears.
- The American press failed to cover the anti-Americanism that grew in the Arab world in the 1990s. This was a remarkable professional failure.
- Al Qaeda's capability was impossible to measure until it was demonstrated. The skill of a terrorist group can't be seen in satellite photos.

II. THE TERROR THREAT TODAY

Al Qaeda poses a grave threat.

- A. Al Qaeda remains alive and potent. Perhaps 1/3 of the pre-9/11/01 Al Qaeda leadership remains at large and new leadership has emerged. Al Qaeda has lost its Afghan sanctuary but has continued to grow on a more decentralized basis. U.S. intelligence warns that the U.S. remains at risk of a large terrorist attack.
- B. Al Qaeda is very ambitious. It seeks to wreak vast, perhaps boundless, destruction and murder in the U.S. Osama Bin Laden proclaims that "to kill Americans ... civilian and military--is an

individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible."¹ His former press spokesman, Suleiman Abu Ghaith, claims a right for Al Qaeda to kill four million Americans, including two million children. Previously some terrorism experts had argued that terrorists only want large audiences, not large numbers of dead. Clearly Al Qaeda breaks that mold.

Al Qaeda has shown great skill and patience--more than other groups. This group may have the skill to acquire and use weapons of mass destruction.

- C. Al Qaeda received an intelligence bonanza after 9/11/01 in the open discussions of means of attacking the U.S. with weapons of mass destruction (WMD)--nuclear, biological, or chemical. We must expect such attack in the future unless Al Qaeda is destroyed--and perhaps even then if Al Qaeda wannabees appear.

III. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF COUNTER-TERROR

- A. Counter-terror is a war of intelligence, not firepower. Terrorists that can be found can be dealt with; finding them is the hard part.
- B. Counter-terror requires large innovation in U.S. national security policy--away from traditional military functions and toward intelligence, public diplomacy, nation building, saving failed states, homeland security, and diplomacy to lock down loose nukes around the world.

IV. U.S. COUNTER-TERROR STRATEGY: A WAR ON TOO FEW FRONTS?

- A. The Bush administration should wage all-out war against Al Qaeda on four broad fronts. Instead it is waging war on one front.
 1. **The offensive.** The Bush administration focuses on the offensive--the hunting of Al Qaeda, the destruction of its Afghan sanctuary, and the denial of new sanctuaries. This offensive has had some successes (destroying the Taliban regime in Afghanistan) but also failures (the escape of Al Qaeda's leadership from Tora Bora in Afghanistan in late 2001).
 2. **The defensive.** The Bush administration's homeland defense effort has large holes. The FBI remains focused on crime solving, not terror prevention. U.S. intelligence, which is the key to victory in counterterror, has not been adequately reformed. Local law enforcement, a front line in the war, has not been engaged in the struggle. U.S. borders remain essentially open. U.S. nuclear reactors and chemical plants remain vulnerable and inviting targets for terrorists. U.S. ports remain open to devastating attack. U.S. biodefenses have been strengthened but the U.S. remains vulnerable to bioterror. U.S. insurance laws governing terror give businesses little incentive to harden their infrastructure against terror. (On homeland security a harsh assessment is Jonathan Chait, "The 9/10 President: Bush's Abysmal Failure on Homeland Security," New Republic, March 10, 2003: 18-23, assigned.)
 3. **"Special teams."** Bush I, Bill Clinton, and Bush II have all failed to move to lock down loose nuclear and biological materials and scientists in Russia and elsewhere. **This policy error is the worst failure of government in modern times.**
 4. **The war of ideas.** To defeat Al Qaeda we must reach a modus vivendi with the wider Muslim world. This requires changing the terms of debate in the Muslim world. Muslim discourse must be channelled in less hostile directions.
 - a. **Public diplomacy.** Public diplomacy--propaganda if you will--should play a large role in this vital effort.

¹ In 1998, quoted in Anonymous, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2002): 59.

But U.S. public diplomacy efforts are half-hearted. The books, articles and media products one would expect produced in a serious war of ideas are not being produced. Where are the Arab-language and other Muslim-language coffee table books with glossy photos and personal histories documenting the horrors of Taliban rule in Afghanistan and Islamist rule in Sudan, and the failure of Islamist rule in Iran? A handful of oral historians and photographers could produce these quickly but the administration isn't interested. Radio Sawa, the current featured public diplomacy project, is perhaps worthy but badly inadequate by itself. And the Voice of America Arab language service has lately been shut down!

This is a large failure as the U.S. has good answers to most charges made against it by Al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda makes four main complaints against the U.S.: (1) It sustains corrupt Arab regimes in power--specifically in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan; (2) It favors an imperialist/infidel Israel; (3) Its sanctions killed thousands of Iraqi children; and (4) The last century has seen vast unprovoked one-way violence by the U.S. and other western states against Muslims, who themselves were peaceful.

Most of these claims are without factual basis (only the second point has much and it is overdrawn). Consider claim #4. In fact violence has run both ways between non-Muslims and Muslims--not one way only. Islamic Sudan slaughtered two million non-Muslim South Sudanese (1983-present), Sudan supports the murderous Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, Islamic Indonesia mass murdered 200,000 Christian East Timorese (1975-2000) and 400,000-500,000 of its Chinese minority (1965), Islamic Turkey mass murdered 600,000-1,500,000 Christian Armenians in 1895 and 1915. Muslims have plenty of non-Muslim blood on their hands. Also relevant are the crimes of Muslims against Muslims: Saddam Hussein's mass killings of Kurds, Shias, and others (totalling perhaps 400,000-500,000 Iraqis killed), Hafez Assad's slaughter at Hama, the vast crimes of the Islamists in Algeria since 1992, and the Iran-Iraq war. Muslims make a weak case when they demand vengeance against others for committing deeds they tolerate among themselves.

The Qur'an says: "**Believers, if an evil-doer brings you a piece of news, inquire first into its truth, lest you should wrong others unwittingly and then regret your action.**" (Qur'an, 49:6). Non-Muslims should challenge the Islamic world to live by this rule. (And they should obey it themselves.)

b. The Arab-Israel conflict. To win the war of ideas the U.S. must change policies that matter to Muslims and that it can't credibly defend. Hence the U.S. must move credibly toward solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. This conflict is, for the first time, televised widely in the Muslim world. Its continuation, combined with the Bush administration's rather unqualified support for Ariel Sharon's policies, is destroying America's standing in the Muslim world. Yet the Bush administration is not pursuing peace with any conviction.

The Quartet Roadmap was a good starting point but hardly adequate by itself. The Administration should also frame its own final-status peace plan and coerce both sides toward it with carrots and sticks. Everyone knows what that final-status plan should look like. It should exchange near-full Israeli withdrawal for full and final peace and full acceptance of Israel by the Arabs. In other words, the terms outlined in Saudi Abdullah plan of 3/02 or the Clinton bridging proposals of 12/00. Let's do it!

Also, the administration should forcefully lead the roadmap negotiations forward. Both sides refuse to make concessions because, they say, they fear the other won't reciprocate. Israel won't halt settlement expansion because it fears the Palestinian Authority (P.A.) won't then move against the Palestinian terrorist organizations, Hamas

and Islamic Jihad. The P.A. won't move against the terrorists because (it says) it fears Israel will then continue expanding settlements while making no concessions, leaving the P.A. as guardians of Israel's expansion against it. The Bush administration should cut through this Alphonse-Gaston routine by acting as guarantor and enforcer of simultaneous concessions. Instead it has watched the violence spiral upward from a distance, without actively involving itself. This is a grave policy error.

- B. **Needed: large policy innovation.** Winning the war on terror will require large innovation in U.S. national security policy. The U.S. should put relatively less resources into traditional military functions--army, navy, air force--and far more resources into counterterror functions. These include intelligence (terrorists that can be found can be dealt with--finding them is the hard part), homeland security, diplomacy to lock down loose nukes and bioweapons around the world, public diplomacy, and nation building/saving failed states. But the organizations that carry out these functions--the intelligence agencies, local law enforcement, the Coast Guard, the Cooperative Threat Reduction Initiative (CTR), the State Department Office of Public Diplomacy, the Agency for International Development, etc.--are politically weak in Washington, so are bound to lose out in Washington budget battles. And most governments, including the U.S. government, are very reluctant to innovate. Can the U.S. government innovate to the extent required?

V. A WAR ON TOO MANY FRONTS? DOES A GENERAL "WAR ON TERROR" LEADS THE U.S. TO ATTACK DRAGONS THAT WOULD NOT ATTACK US?

Should the U.S. wage a "War on Terror"? President Bush has defined a broad crusade. His rhetoric frames a war with all who use the terror tool. This includes scores of groups worldwide that have never viewed the U.S. as enemies, from the Kashmiri rebels to the Tamil Tigers to the Colombian FARC to the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda to Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Israel/Palestine.

Some argue that President Bush should have defined the enemy as Al Qaeda and demonized its ideology and leadership, as Roosevelt demonized the German and Japanese leadership in World War II. Keep your eyes on the prize.

They argue that Bush's broad focus has caused him to be carried forward by his own rhetoric, e.g., in the Mideast into conflict with the Palestinians.

VI. THE LONG RUN: TWO SCARY TRENDS RAISE LARGE DURABLE RISKS OF GRAND TERROR

Two worrisome long-term trends raise the risk of terror with weapons of mass destruction.

- A. Rising violent religious fundamentalism in Islam, Hinduism, Christianity and Judaism creates an energy source for future terrorists. It raises the danger that more Al Quedas could be born.

Millennarian fundamentalism is especially dangerous and has increased markedly among Muslims, Christians, Jews and Buddhists over the past 15 years. (See Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror* [NY: Random House, 2002.]

- B. Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) technology and knowledge are spreading relentlessly.
1. Weapons of mass destruction will grow constantly more accessible to terrorists as technology relentlessly advances and technical knowledge disperses.
 - a. The price of making WMD falls steadily as technology advances until it becomes affordable by terrorists.
 - b. The internet has a disastrous downside. It enables groups with only rudimentary research skills to quickly learn what they need to assemble and use WMD or to launch other grand terror attacks.
 2. As noted above, the Soviet collapse dispersed technical knowledge as Soviet nuclear, biological and chemical weapons scientists scattered. And Soviet weapons materials are at risk of theft or sale to terrorists.
 3. As noted above, the post-9/11/01 public discussion of U.S. vulnerabilities to grand terror

gave Al Qaeda and like terrorists an intelligence bonanza. They probably learned a good deal about how to gain and deploy weapons of mass destruction.

- C. The spread of bioweapons and the resulting risk of bioterror pose a striking danger, perhaps worse in some ways in the long run than the danger posed by nuclear weapons. Bioweapons are far cheaper to make than nuclear weapons so even non-state actors (terrorists) may be able to make them--and terrorists are far harder to deter than states. Bioweapons can be used anonymously so, again, their use is especially hard to deter. And establishing an arms control regime to control bioweapons seems very difficult--far harder than a nuclear arms control regime--as bioweapons programs have no clear signature that distinguishes them from legitimate biomedical research programs. They are truly weapons from hell. Their dark shadow will lie across the future of the human race as far as the eye can see.

Some, including myself, were lulled about the bioterror danger before 9/11/01 because the United States and most other major powers were uninterested in developing bioweapons. (The U.S. abandoned its offensive bioweapons program in 1969). We inferred from this that bioweapons weren't very useful and so wouldn't be developed or used. But while bioweapons may be unuseful to **states**, they are very useful to **terrorists** who seek vast destruction instead of finite military objectives. The appearance of skilled terrorist groups that aspire to mass murder, like Al Qaeda, means that a new class of potential bioweapons users has appeared. These weapons now have customers!

Many were also lulled by the world's success in surviving the nuclear revolution. They assumed that nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons were all of a piece--all were "weapons of mass destruction"--and that measures that worked with one (arms control, deterrence) would work with all three. But as noted above bioweapons are far to control by agreement than nuclear weapons and their use is far harder to deter. This is because bioweapons are more likely to be obtained by non-deterrable terrorists; they can more easily be used anonymously; and arms control to halt their spread is far harder.

(My thinking on bioweapons has been strongly informed by Greg Koblenz, a recent MIT political science department Ph.D. and an expert on biological war. His dissertation elaborates these points. He will teach a course at MIT on these issues in Spring 2005--take it!)

VII. SATISFACTORY ANSWERS ARE HARD TO FIND!

- A. One answer: Isolationism toward the world and Stalinism with a democratic face at home in the U.S. Tight surveillance of all human activity by a vastly increased state security apparatus. This is a dreadful specter but we will be driven there unless we find other answers to the grand terror risk.
- B. Other answers to address the longterm terror danger:
1. Build a worldwide regime to corral and lock down WMD. This regime would require a new U.S. foreign policy--a U.S. willingness to offer quid pro quos to others (e.g., security guarantees and a willingness to play peacemaker) in exchange for their acceptance of inferior military status. This project should have the highest priority in U.S. foreign policy. But as noted above biological weapons can be only poorly controlled by such a regime so it offers only a partial answer.
 2. Make vast investment in counter-bio-terror measures. Such measures will be costly but could greatly limit the damage that bioterror will do. Instead of suffering apocalyptic damage we will merely suffer large damage. Hundreds or thousands instead of millions of deaths--if we're lucky.
 3. Move to end civil wars and save failing states around the world. Failed states are the breeding ground for terror.
 4. Move to coopt potentially discontented peoples by sharing the benefits of progress with

- them. End U.S. import barriers on agriculture and textile products, e.g., from Pakistan.
5. Dampen human hatred by commonizing historical narratives worldwide. Much human hatred rests on false historical narratives claiming that "we were innocent, even benevolent; you started all our mutual wars! We are victims!" The hatred that drives much terrorism could be drained of its energy by destroying the false narratives that underpin this hatred.

Historical mythmaking lends itself to solution by a purpose-built single-mission organization like Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch. Such an organization (Amnesia International) would audit the world for false historical narratives and expose the worst ones, subjecting them to public criticism and demanding that their purveyors subject their narrative to procedures that could provide remedy. The best remedy: to agree to debate the narrative with its target peoples. Let narratives converge through free debate.

Newer and truer narratives won't solve everything. For example they won't solve the problem of millennialist terrorism (e.g., by movements like Aum Shinrikyo), as these are fuelled by a religious belief system, not a historical belief system. But new/true narratives will solve a lot.

To address short-term dangers:

1. Wage a war of ideas with militant Islam in the Islamic world, and with other forms of religious extremism worldwide. Bring organized religion within the realm of political accountability. Religions today are seldom held accountable for the consequences of their words and deeds. This should change. Groups should no longer be allowed to define themselves as religions. Instead society should impose **it's** definition, which should be: "Religions are movements of faith that do not preach hate or advocate illegitimate violence." No tax exemption for the others. Instead they should be stigmatized.
2. Push hard for a just peace between Israel and the Palestinians. If unchecked this conflict will fuel anti-American feeling in the Islamic world. This conflict has become a national security threat to America and ending it should take the highest priority.

As noted above, to reach peace the U.S. government should frame its own peace plan and use carrots and sticks to push both sides toward it.

These answers seem inadequate to me, so the future looks dark. Batten down the hatches. Don't own stock on margin.

A reading list:

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