

The Struggle against Terrorism

Barry R. Posen

Grand Strategy, Strategy, and Tactics

Three to four thousand people, nearly all American citizens, perished in the aircraft hijackings and attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.¹ They were murdered for political reasons by a loosely integrated foreign terrorist political organization called al-Qaeda. Below I ask four questions related to these attacks: First, what is the nature of the threat posed by al-Qaeda? Second, what is an appropriate strategy for dealing with it? Third, how might the U.S. defense establishment have to change to fight this adversary? And fourth, what does the struggle against al-Qaeda mean for overall U.S. foreign policy?

The Adversary

Al-Qaeda is a network of like-minded individuals, apparently all Muslim but of many different nationalities, that links together groups in as many as sixty countries. Osama bin Laden, a wealthy Saudi who took part in the Afghan rebellion against the Soviet occupation (1979–89), developed this network. He inspires, finances, organizes, and trains many of its members. He seems to be in direct command of some but not all of them. Bin Laden and his associates share a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, which they have opportunistically twisted into a political ideology of violent struggle. He and his principles enjoy some popular support in the Islamic world, though it is difficult to gauge its depth and breadth. Al-Qaeda wants the United States, indeed the West more generally, out of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. In bin Laden's view, the United States helps to keep Muslim peoples in poverty and imposes upon them a Western culture deeply offensive to traditional Islam. He blames the United States for the continued suffering of the people of Iraq and

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1. It is impossible at this time to offer a more precise figure. See Eric Lipton, "Numbers Vary in Tallies of the Victims," *New York Times*, October 25, 2001, pp. B1, B10.

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for the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. For him, Israel is a foreign element in the Middle East and should be destroyed. The U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia is a desecration of the Islamic holy places and must end.² Once the United States exits the region, al-Qaeda hopes to overthrow the governments of Saudi Arabia and Egypt and replace them with fundamentalist, Taliban-like regimes. It is no wonder that the Saudi regime considered bin Laden so dangerous that it stripped him of his citizenship in 1994.

Al-Qaeda is an ambitious, ruthless, and technically proficient organization. The stark evidence is at hand. It has attacked the United States before, but not with such striking results.³ For the September 11 attack, at least nineteen men, supported by perhaps a dozen others, plotted for years an action that at least some of them knew would result in their deaths. Each member of the conspiracy had numerous opportunities to defect. The terrorists piloting the four passenger jets understood the level of destruction they would exact. They carefully studied airport security and found the airports that seemed most vulnerable. Several of these men appear to have trained for years in U.S. flight schools to learn enough to pilot an aircraft into a building. The cockpits of the 757 and 767 are quite similar, which does not seem coincidental; a single experienced pilot could tutor all of the hijackers on the fine points of operating the aircraft. Between the two aircraft types, the conspirators could choose from a wide selection of flights. The 767s, the aircraft with the most fuel and hence the greatest destructive potential, were directed at the biggest target, the World Trade Center. The proximity of the departure airports to the targets permitted tactical "surprise." All four planes had small passenger complements relative to their capacity; this hardly seems coincidental given the hijackers' plan to take the aircraft with box-cutters. The hijackings of all four airliners were carefully synchronized. If this had been a Western commando raid, it would be considered nothing short of brilliant. Given the demonstrated motivation and organizational and technical skills of its members, al-Qaeda will likely attempt further large-scale attacks on the United States or its citizens and soldiers abroad, or both.

2. United Kingdom, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), *Responsibility for the Terrorist Atrocities in the United States, 11 September 2001*, pp. 4–5, <http://www/fco.gov.uk/news/keytheme/pages.asp>. See also Kenneth Katzman, *Terrorism: Near Eastern Groups and State Sponsors, 2001*, Congressional Research Service, report for Congress, September 10, 2001, pp. 2, 9.

3. FCO, *Responsibility for the Terrorist Atrocities in the United States*, pp. 6–10, links al-Qaeda to the fight against U.S. special operations forces in Somalia in October 1993, to the bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998, and to the attack on the USS *Cole* in October 2000, as well as to several thwarted operations. See also Katzman, *Terrorism*, pp. 10–11, which also links bin Ladin indirectly to the February 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

Al-Qaeda benefited from the direct support of Afghanistan, which had been governed in recent years by the fundamentalist Taliban religio-political movement. The Taliban ruled Afghanistan as a kind of crude police state. Not only was bin Laden protected by the regime, but his money and his forces were a pillar of its power. The Taliban had been asked before by the United States to expel bin Laden but always demurred. This base proved to be of great utility to bin Laden and to al-Qaeda. Individuals came from around the world to receive training in terrorist techniques and tactics.⁴ Afghanistan is a large country, with rugged terrain and long and lawless borders, far from any Western base; it is hard to monitor, let alone attack—in other words, a perfect hideout. Without this bastion, bin Laden would probably have been on the run much of the time. Al-Qaeda also seems to have benefited from the tacit support of some other governments; persistent reports suggest that wealthy individuals in several Gulf states have contributed to the organization, with the knowledge though not the active cooperation of their governments. Saudi Arabia is often mentioned by name.⁵

As has often been pointed out, the United States and most developed, democratic countries are extremely vulnerable to terrorist attacks. These are open societies that have not policed their borders successfully. Drugs and illegal immigrants move into the United States with ease; cash, guns, and stolen cars move out. Dangerous activities occur in modern society every day. Aircraft take off and land; hazardous materials—flammable, explosive, or poisonous—move by truck, train, and ship. And in the United States, those with money and some patience can obtain explosives, firearms, and quantities of ammunition. Prosaic means can be employed against everyday targets to produce catastrophic results. One must nevertheless also be concerned about chemical, biological, or nuclear attacks. The ability to make chemical agents and biological poisons is more widespread than ever, though turning the basic ingredients into useful weapons and delivering them effectively on a large scale has thus far not proven easy for small clandestine groups.⁶ Nuclear weapons are more difficult to obtain, but fears remain that some of the very large number manufactured during the Cold War, or some of those built by new nuclear states, could fall into the wrong hands. Alternatively, primitive nuclear weapons de-

4. Ali A. Jalali, "Afghanistan: The Anatomy of an Ongoing Conflict," *Parameters*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Spring 2001), p. 5, <http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/o1spring;jalali.htm>.

5. "Saudi Arabia: The Double-Act Wears Thin," *Economist*, September 29, 2001, pp. 22–23.

6. As of this writing, the anthrax poisonings in the United States do not contradict this statement. Until we know more, all we can conclude is that small amounts of lethal anthrax can be obtained and, through the mail, can hurt or kill small numbers of people.

signs are widely available; getting the fissionable material to make a nuclear bomb is still difficult, but not all of this material is as secure as it should be. Thus the possibility of a major terrorist attack with biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons cannot be ruled out.

Most terrorists do not exploit the vulnerabilities of advanced industrial societies; law enforcement helps to make it difficult, though obviously not impossible. More important, most terrorist organizations do not wish to make the United States an implacable enemy. Many have limited political objectives, which the United States can hinder or help. Al-Qaeda clearly has more ambitious objectives than most terrorist organizations; it seeks to expel the most powerful state in history from a part of the world that has been central to U.S. foreign policy for more than half a century, and it intends to do so without a large standing military. Hence al-Qaeda has opted for large-scale murder to achieve its objectives, and it will seek to kill Americans so long as the United States does not give in to its demands.

What Is To Be Done?

Like any war, or even any large civil project, the war against al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups bent on mass destruction requires a strategy. A strategy lays out an interlinked chain of problems that must be solved to address the ultimate problem, the defeat of the adversary. Although the United States and its allies may never fully destroy al-Qaeda, or aligned organizations, or new organizations that emulate them, the antiterror coalition that the United States has built can aspire to reduce the terrorists to desperate groups of exhausted stragglers, with few resources and little hope of success. A strategy sets priorities and focuses available resources—money, time, political capital, and military power—on the main effort. Strategies have both a military and a diplomatic dimension. Within the military dimension, states may choose among offensive, defensive, and punitive operations. In this war, diplomacy will loom larger than military operations, and within the military dimension, defensive activities will loom larger than offensive and punitive ones. That said, without a militarily offensive component, this war cannot be won. Finally, this is a war of attrition, not a blitzkrieg. Al-Qaeda cannot be rounded up in a night's work. If the United States wishes to pursue a major effort against al-Qaeda, its supporters, and any future imitators, it must be prepared to accept significant costs and risks over an extended period. There will likely be an exchange of blows, in the United States and abroad. This war is necessary because bin Laden and

others like him will continue to attack the United States so long as it asserts its power and influence in other parts of the world.

Sound strategy requires the establishment of priorities because resources are scarce. Resources must be ruthlessly concentrated against the main threat. There are two primary adversaries in this fight against terrorism: the extended al-Qaeda organization and the states that support it. Al-Qaeda is the principal terrorist organization that has attempted to engage in mass destruction attacks on the United States.⁷ It has shown itself to be more capable and more politically ambitious than most. It is the imminent threat. Other terrorist organizations, however, must be kept under surveillance and attacked preemptively if they seem ready to strike the United States or its allies in mass attacks, or if they appear intent on aligning themselves with al-Qaeda.

Allies are essential for success in the war on terrorism, which helps to explain the determination of President George W. Bush and his administration to build a broad coalition. Bin Laden had training camps and bases in Afghanistan, but in other countries al-Qaeda's presence has been more shadowy. Wherever this organization takes root, it must be fought. But it will not always be necessary or possible for the United States to do the fighting. Allied military and police forces are more appropriate instruments to apprehend terrorists operating within their national borders than are U.S. forces. They have information that the United States may not have, and they know the territory and people better. The odds of finding the adversary and avoiding collateral damage increase to the extent that the "host" nation-state does the hard work. Moreover, host states can deal better politically with any collateral damage—that is, accidental destruction of civilian life and property. Much of the war will look a lot like conventional law enforcement by the governments of cooperative countries. Efforts must also be made to weaken terrorist organizations by attacking their infrastructure; both cooperative and clandestine methods can be used to deny these groups access to funds and matériel.

As noted earlier, al-Qaeda has found tacit and active support from nation-states. In the case of partial or tacit support, it may be assumed that there is some disagreement within the political leadership of the country in question about the wisdom of such a policy. The objective is to induce these states to change their practices through persuasion, bribery, or nonviolent coercion.

7. The February 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center is not directly attributed to al-Qaeda, but Ramzi Yusef, convicted of masterminding that crime, reportedly collaborated with al-Qaeda to organize several unsuccessful terrorist efforts in Asia. Katzman, *Terrorism*, p. 10.

Again, diplomacy looms large in this struggle. Nevertheless, the United States must be prepared to bypass national governments should they fail to cooperate. Given the utter ruthlessness of al-Qaeda, the United States cannot afford to allow it a sanctuary anywhere. From time to time, U.S. forces may simply need to attack al-Qaeda cells directly. This may be a job for special operations forces who would try to avoid contact with national armed forces. In any case, to deter national armed forces from getting in the way, or to foil them if they try, the United States must maintain a strong conventional military capability. Occasionally, it may be necessary to engage in conventional wars with such countries.

Some regimes may choose to support bin Laden's cause, like the Taliban did in Afghanistan. Where a regime has close relations with the terrorists, it is reasonable to treat the host nation as an ally of al-Qaeda and an enemy of the United States. The United States must be prepared to wage war against such states to destroy terrorist groups themselves, to prevent their reconstitution by eliminating the regimes that support them, and to deter other nation-states from supporting terrorism. The United States must make it clear that direct support of terrorists who try to kill large numbers of Americans is tantamount to participation in the attack. If a nation-state had directed a conventional weapon of war at the World Trade Center, U.S. forces would have retaliated immediately. Particularly in the age of weapons of mass destruction, the United States cannot allow any state to participate in catastrophic attacks on its homeland with impunity. More intensive defensive precautions can reduce but not eliminate U.S. vulnerability to mass destruction attacks, so deterrence must be the first line of defense. For these reasons, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan had to be destroyed.

Initially, the Bush administration hesitated to embrace the objective of ousting the Taliban regime.⁸ The administration was more interested in bin Laden and al-Qaeda than in their hosts, and in his speech of September 20, President Bush gave the Taliban an opportunity to "hand over the terrorists" or "share

8. Indeed, as of late October 2001, both the U.S. Department of State and the U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office used elliptical language to discuss coalition war aims in Afghanistan. Secretary of State Colin Powell could only bring himself to say, "There is, however, no place in a new Afghan government for the current leaders of the Taliban regime." See "Campaign against Terrorism," prepared statement for the House International Relations Committee, U.S. Department of State, October 24, 2001, p. 2, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2001>. The United Kingdom's statement of war aims suggests that "we require sufficient change in the leadership to ensure that Afghanistan's links to international terrorism are broken." Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Defeating International Terrorism: Campaign Objectives," p. 1, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/news/keythemehome.asp>.

their fate.”⁹ Even after the first five days of air strikes, in his press conference of October 11, President Bush gave the Taliban a “second chance” to turn over bin Laden and evict his organization from Afghanistan.¹⁰ Given the difficulty of finding these terrorists, as well as the political complexities of waging war in Afghanistan, this was a reasonable offer, though in my judgment a harmful one from the point of view of deterrence of future attacks. Once the Taliban declined the opportunity to cooperate, the United States had no choice but to wage war on them to the extent that was militarily and politically practical, with the objective of driving them from power.¹¹

Tactics: Forces and Methods

Any military campaign has defensive and offensive aspects. Because of its geographical position and great military potential, the United States is accustomed to being on the offensive, but in this campaign the defensive must assume equal or greater importance. Considerable time will be required to develop enough political and military pressure on al-Qaeda to suppress its ability to conduct operations. That organization will probably have the opportunity to attack the United States or its friends again. The United States must thus do all it can defensively to reduce the probability of additional attacks on the U.S. homeland, and to limit the damage should such attacks occur. The United States has been taught a costly but valuable lesson about the vulnerability of modern society to terrorism. Thus, even after al-Qaeda is destroyed, the United States will need to maintain its defenses. This means new vigilance in the most fragile corners of the transportation, energy, power, and communication systems and closer attention to the security of government buildings.

The mobilization of thousands of National Guardsmen and reservists after September 11 had the immediate purpose of enhancing U.S. territorial defenses—including more attentive airspace management, port surveillance, and airport security. This is only the beginning. A new or reoriented joint, multiservice command, staffed by active-duty regulars and reservists and dedicated exclusively to territorial defense, should be created to oversee this en-

9. See “The President’s Address,” *Washington Post*, September 21, 2001, p. A24.

10. Patrick E. Tyler and Elisabeth Bumiller, “Just Bring Him In, President Hints He Will Halt War If bin Laden Is Handed Over,” *New York Times*, October 12, 2001, pp. A1, B5.

11. U.S. leaders wisely exercised some restraint; they did not put large ground forces into the country, who would have provided numerous targets for Afghan riflemen and the appearance of a mission of conquest. Nor did they use firepower indiscriminately, and by large-scale killing of Afghan civilians create the appearance of making war on all Muslims.

during mission.¹² Many additional military man-hours will likely be required on a sustained basis for territorial defense. Elements of the active armed forces, the Coast Guard, and the National Guard and Reserves may require redirection or expansion, or possibly both. The United States may need to ask its weekend warriors to serve more weekends, and indeed more weeks, each year.

Enhanced intelligence capabilities are necessary for both defense and offense. Students of terrorism and its close cousin, insurgency, invariably stress the critical importance of intelligence.¹³ Intelligence must be gathered on terrorist groups overseas. Such intelligence will come not only from U.S. technical surveillance methods and spies but also from the daily hard work of national police forces abroad. The critical importance of intelligence is one of the main reasons why the United States needs the support of allies. U.S. law enforcement agencies will also have to redouble their efforts. Intelligence provides the data necessary for preventive and preemptive attacks by the national military or police forces of the countries in which the terrorist groups have taken refuge, or by U.S. forces. Even tardy warning of terrorist attacks as they get under way may provide a useful and life-saving margin of time. Intelligence from abroad must also be blended with intelligence gathered at home.

More sustained attention is necessary to the organization of the U.S. counterterrorism intelligence effort. Historically, the following has proven of great utility in all kinds of military endeavors: the staffing of a dedicated intelligence center with full-time, long-serving professionals with a deep knowledge of the adversary; the timely collection of intelligence from multiple sources in that center; the analysis of that data for specific information as well as patterns that reveal the adversary's presence or intentions; and the transmission of that data to those who can best use it for offensive or defensive pur-

12. U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, September 30, 2001, p. 19, states that "DOD will review the establishment of a new unified combatant commander to help address complex inter-agency issues and provide a single military commander to focus military support." This is too tentative.

13. "Nearly all of the threatened or their experts agree that the key to an effective response to terrorism is good intelligence and that such intelligence is difficult to acquire." J. Bowyer Bell, *A Time of Terror: How Democratic Societies Respond to Revolutionary Violence* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), p. 134. Douglas S. Blaufarb draws similar lessons from the U.S. counterinsurgency effort in Vietnam: "Small, lightly armed units, pinpointed operations assisted by 'hunter-killer' squads, imaginative psychological warfare operations—and all of this based upon coordinated collection and exploitation of intelligence—should be the main reliance of the military side of the effort. The police, if they have or can be brought to develop the capability, should play a major role in the intelligence effort and in other programs requiring frequent contact with the public." Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era: U.S. Doctrine and Performance, 1950 to the Present* (New York: Free Press, 1977), p. 308.

poses.¹⁴ Anecdotal information suggests that the United States suffered shortcomings in this regard; data may have been present that could have permitted the early detection of the September 11 plot, but it was not fully exploited.¹⁵ Formally, the Central Intelligence Agency's Counterterrorist Center (CTC) is responsible for "coordinating the counterterrorist efforts of the Intelligence Community," including "exploiting all source intelligence."¹⁶ Nevertheless, this intelligence effort has been the subject of persistent criticism, in particular for weaknesses in interagency cooperation; failure to concentrate all potentially useful information in one place, especially information gathered by law enforcement agencies in the United States; and untimely analysis.¹⁷ The CTC's mandate needs to be strengthened so that all useful information gathered by any intelligence or law enforcement agency is concentrated for analysis. The CTC will also require more money and staff.

Offensive action and offensive military capabilities are necessary components of a successful counterterror strategy. Offensive action is required to destroy regimes that align with terrorists; offensive capabilities allow the United States to threaten credibly other regimes that might consider supporting terrorists. Offensive action against terrorists is needed to eliminate them as threats. But even unsuccessful offensive actions, which force terrorist units or terrorist cells to stay perpetually on the move to avoid destruction, will help to reduce their capability. Constant surveillance makes it difficult for them to plan and organize. Constant pursuit makes it dangerous for them to rest. The threat of offensive action is critical to exhausting the terrorists, whether they are with units in the field in Afghanistan or hiding out in cities and empty quarters across the world. This threat will be credible only if the United States launches

14. The clearest historically grounded exposition of this argument is to be found in Patrick Beesly, *Very Special Intelligence* (New York: Ballantine, 1977), pp. 1-24, which details the formation of the Royal Navy's Operational Intelligence Center, to exploit all source intelligence for the antisubmarine warfare campaign early in World War II.

15. James Risen, "In Hindsight, C.I.A. Sees Flaws That Hindered Efforts on Terror," *New York Times*, October 7, 2001, pp. A1, B2. "In hindsight, it is becoming clear that the C.I.A., F.B.I. and other agencies had significant fragments of information that, under ideal circumstances, could have provided some warning if they had all been pieced together and shared rapidly."

16. "The War on Terrorism, DCI Counterterrorist Center," <http://www.cia.gov/terrorism.ctc.html>.

17. The National Commission on Terrorism, Ambassador L. Paul Bremer III, Maurice Sonnenberg, Richard K. Betts, Wayne A. Downing, Jane Harman, Fred C. Iklé, Juliette N. Kayyem, John F. Lewis, Jr., Gardner Peckham, and R. James Woolsey, *Countering the Changing Threat of International Terrorism*, report of the National Commission on Terrorism (Washington, D.C., June 5, 2000), <http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/commission.htm>; and James Kitfield, "CIA, FBI, and Pentagon Team to Fight Terrorism," September 18, 2000, GOVEXEC.com, <http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0900/091900nt.htm>.

an offensive operation from time to time, large or small. Offensive action is also necessary to support U.S. diplomacy. Thus far, U.S. diplomats have stressed the concerns of existing and prospective allies that the United States might overreact with excessive and indiscriminate violence. It is disturbing that they believe that U.S. decisionmakers could be so stupid and brutal, but it is a good thing that they understand the deep emotion that drives U.S. purpose. The United States must threaten offensive war so that these allies understand the seriousness of U.S. intent. The more cooperation the United States gets from allies on the intelligence and policing front, the less necessary it becomes for the United States to behave unilaterally, militarily, and with the attendant risks of collateral damage and escalation. If the United States does not act militarily from time to time, this risk will lose its force as an incentive for U.S. allies. Periodically taking the offensive is also necessary to maintain morale at home. Given that al-Qaeda will continue to try to hit the United States and its friends, the public will probably want to see the United States "bring justice to our enemies."¹⁸

To take the offensive, the United States will need to exploit perishable intelligence on the existence and location of terrorist cells. Flexible, fast, and relatively discriminate forces are essential. The American people and the leaders of the American military must be prepared to accept the risk of significant U.S. casualties in small, hard-hitting raids. Even when other nations cooperate by providing intelligence, and would be willing to arrest or destroy terrorists in their midst, they may lack the capability and need augmentation from the United States. In any event, political decisionmakers in the United States and abroad who approve strikes on the basis of this information will have to come to terms with the risks to innocent civilians. Occasions will surely arise when there are trade-offs between effectiveness against the adversary and casualties to U.S. and allied forces, or to innocents caught in the crossfire. It will occasionally be necessary to err on the side of effectiveness. This is a tragic fact of war that will stress the persuasive skills of U.S. diplomats, as it did in the first weeks of the air campaign against Afghanistan.

The United States has large special operations forces well suited to the counterterror mission: small groups of highly trained individual fighters from all the services, supported by an array of specially designed and expertly pi-

18. This sentiment was expressed by President Bush in his address to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001: "Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done." See "The President's Address."

loted helicopters, aircraft, and small watercraft. (They also include experts at training and advising foreign soldiers.) These forces may be more effective and cause less collateral damage than cruise missiles or precision guided bombs in certain situations. In the past, U.S. decisionmakers have been reluctant to employ these forces because their missions involve a significant risk to the troops. Given the seriousness of the new war and the apparent commitment of the American people, such concerns are likely to diminish. These forces may require additional mobility assets—planes, helicopters, and other more exotic equipment. It may also be reasonable to expand the special operations forces by reorienting some active units such as the 82d Airborne Division and the 101st Air Assault (Helicopter) Division to this mission. The U.S. Marine Corps also deploys many units that could prove useful to the counterterror mission. Three separate reinforced battalions of marines are generally deployed afloat, on special assault ships loaded with helicopters and hovercraft, around the world at any one time. Though the marines judge these forces to be “special operations capable,” it would be sensible to stress even further their special operations mission. Moreover, given that most U.S. Navy carrier air wings do not currently fill the hangar space available on existing carriers, it is reasonable to put a company of army or marine special operations troops and their associated helicopters on each one.¹⁹ To permit speedy action, emergency basing and overflight rights around the world must be obtained in advance—yet another task for diplomacy.

The military will also need to augment its ability to gather tactical intelligence to support operations under way. Often the United States will have only a rough idea of where terrorist training camps, quasi regular units, or clandestine units are hiding. An enhanced ability to focus intelligence assets on key objectives is of great importance. Insofar as the adversary operates in small groups without much heavy equipment, the task will be difficult. For the last decade, the United States has experimented with unmanned aircraft, “intelligence drones.” It needs to buy more drones, and soon. These devices have been used profitably to police Bosnia and Kosovo. They also played a role in the Kosovo war. Unlike satellites, intelligence drones are extremely flexible; they can focus on a small piece of terrain and remain overhead for several hours at a time. They are just machines, and by current standards not very ex-

19. If U.S. Army special operations units are to be permanently deployed at sea, they will need to purchase new “marinized” versions of their current helicopters that are better able to fit below decks, communicate with navy vessels and aircraft, and withstand the corrosive effects of salt air.

pensive ones; the American people will not mind losing one every now and then to obtain critical information.²⁰

Above all, the “war” against terrorism will require patience and sustained national will. It will take time for the United States and its allies build up a full intelligence picture of the adversary and enhance existing worldwide intelligence capabilities to better detect these elusive foes. As the United States pursues terrorist groups, they will fight back. They will resist locally when U.S. and other forces try to apprehend or destroy them. More important, the terrorists will try to mount additional attacks against the United States, against U.S. installations abroad, and against U.S. allies. Terrorists will attempt this anyway, but in seeking to destroy them, the United States may cause them to accelerate their attacks. The U.S. security establishment will need to be innovative and adaptive, just as the adversary has proven to be.²¹ The American people cannot go into this fight without understanding that they may suffer more pain before the problem recedes.

Finally, American leaders will have to fight political and bureaucratic inertia at home and abroad. Prior to September 11, the United States had a counterterrorism “administered policy.” Administered policies prevail in democracies, where the political leadership regularly trades off initiatives that might be highly effective in one policy area against their costs measured in terms of other agendas, values, and policies. Bureaucracies struggle to maintain their autonomy and often fail to cooperate to achieve stated purposes. Change, when it comes, is incremental. Before September 11 the counterterrorism effort was like any other administered policy; although it enjoyed higher priority and more resources than it once did, it still competed for political, financial, and human resources on a relatively level playing field with many other policies. That approach was entirely reasonable to me, but has been proven wrong. War is different; in war other policies assume significantly lower priority. Be-

20. The U.S. Air Force RQ-1A Predator costs about \$8 million apiece. This is the price for a small production run; production on a larger scale would reduce the unit cost. The air force currently has only thirteen Predators. Ted Nicholas and Rita Rossi, *Military Cost Handbook*, 22d ed. (Fountain Valley, Calif.: Data Search Associates, 2001), p. 4-2. See also Craig Hoyle, “US Build-Up Highlights UAV shortage,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, October 10, 2001, p. 5.

21. For example, the Bush administration has appointed Governor Tom Ridge head of the new Office of Homeland Security to coordinate the activities of all the disparate governmental organizations that contribute to territorial defense; he controls nothing. It may instead prove necessary to organize a new Department of Territorial Security, to consolidate control over some or all of the following: air surveillance and defense units; the Coast Guard; the Border Patrol, counterterrorism elements of the FBI; and federal-level emergency medical response, humanitarian relief, and damage-repair capabilities.

cause terrorists are elusive, it will be difficult to sustain the kind of focus that war requires. Failure to sustain that focus will allow al-Qaeda to remain quiet, lick any wounds it sustains in the first flush of U.S. anger and coalition solidarity, rebuild its cadres, and then strike again—harder and more effectively than before. While life must go on, a return to treating counterterrorism as an administered policy must await significant evidence of real success in destroying the al-Qaeda organization.

The Diplomacy of a Counterterror War and the Implications for U.S. Grand Strategy

Both enthusiastic allies and quiet back-channel assistance from around the world will be central to a successful counterterror campaign, but allies are not always easy to find. The United States has been spoiled by its Cold War success. Threatened neighbors of the Soviet Union quickly sought alignment with the United States. During Operation Desert Shield, Arab states in the way of Saddam Hussein's legions did not require much persuading to join the U.S. coalition; those farther away needed subsidies just to show up. The war against terrorism is more difficult. The major al-Qaeda terrorist action has been directed against the United States, though attacks both at home and abroad have caught many foreign nationals in the crossfire. States that have been the victims of tenuously related or unrelated terrorist groups have proven responsive to U.S. requests for help (e.g., Russia, India, and Israel). The United States also needs the assistance of states whose leaders believe that (1) they are not terrorist targets, (2) they can easily redirect terror toward others, or (3) their own citizens may sympathize with al-Qaeda.

The United States needs friends, and thus must prioritize among its many foreign policy and defense policy initiatives, because these initiatives have frequently antagonized other governments and peoples. All the governments whose help is required, whether they are democratic or not, must deal with their own publics. Therefore the United States must find ways to explain to their people why cooperation against these terrorists is in their interest. The United States clearly cannot afford to make every state in the world prosperous and happy. It cannot afford to end every conflict in favor of any ally the United States needs. Sometimes the United States will want the help of both parties to a regional conflict, and cannot reward one party at the expense of another. And it cannot afford to peremptorily abandon long-standing allies in a heartbeat. Such actions have their own costs and risks. But the United States

must be much more disciplined in its choices, and much more attuned to the views of others, if it is to sustain this coalition over the long term.²²

In the years since the Cold War ended, the United States has been immensely powerful, and relatively capricious. It has often acted against the interests of others in pursuit of modest gains, as it did in the case of NATO expansion, the Kosovo war, and the Bush administration's early insistence that national missile defenses would be built with or without Russian cooperation. All these policies had alternatives that could have achieved many of the goals of their U.S. advocates while leaving Russia and others less displeased. Similarly the United States has often failed to act out of fear of incurring modest costs: It has applied insufficient pressure on Israel to suppress its settlement policy in the West Bank and Gaza; has shown little creativity in trying to end the politically damaging low-grade war and leaky economic embargo of Iraq; and made no effort to help others inhibit the course of the Rwanda genocide. The American media have been content to cover international politics episodically and often superficially. The U.S. foreign and security policy record is not one of unalloyed failure.²³ It is, however, a record of indiscipline in which calculations of short-term domestic political gains or losses often dominated decision-making.

The post-Cold War world of easy preeminence, controlled low-cost wars, budgetary plenty, and choices avoided is over. In the past I argued that the United States failed to settle on a grand strategy to guide its international behavior after the demise of the Soviet Union.²⁴ Democrats and Republicans

22. Examples of the kinds of diplomatic choices that the United States faces abound. Russia can control its own nuclear materials and weapons and provide intelligence; Russia has been unhappy with NATO expansion and the Bush administration's national missile defense program. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states have great air bases, all used by the United States during the Gulf War. These bases would prove useful if the counterterror campaign expands to Iraq. These countries find U.S. tolerance of Israeli settlement policies on the West Bank and Gaza to be a significant irritant. Though the UN oil-for-food program has enabled Iraq to feed and care for its people—and Saddam Hussein deserves the blame for their current misery—the continuation of Gulf War sanctions and the regular bombing of Iraq by U.S. and British warplanes help Saddam portray Iraq as the aggrieved party in the Arab world. Pakistan, a former close supporter of the Taliban, was alienated by the United States' cavalier treatment after the end of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Pakistan was also, until recently, under economic sanctions enacted to show U.S. displeasure with its May 1998 nuclear weapons tests. Pakistan may have the most political influence over Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan whose cooperation will be needed to bring a stable government to that country.

23. Russia did not collapse; the nuclear weapons of the Soviet Union were gathered up and consolidated in Russia for safekeeping; the Balkan wars ended; and the great and middle powers of the world have not yet fallen into any new cold wars with one another. U.S. foreign policymakers get much of the credit.

24. Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Winter 1996/97), pp. 5–53.

could agree on only one thing: The United States should remain the most powerful state in the world. Beyond that, a good many Democrats wanted to use this power to pursue liberal purposes: improving international organizations and institutions, strengthening international treaties, increasing the power of international law, and spreading democracy. Republicans seem to have wanted to use this power to consolidate U.S. superiority and to create still more power. Russia was viewed as perpetually on the verge of backsliding toward Soviet-style imperialism, and China was feared as a budding peer competitor; both needed containment. Neither political party energetically discussed its preferred policies with the American people. Neither was willing to ask the American people for serious sacrifices to pursue its preferred objectives, and neither had to do so. Sacrifice is now necessary if the United States is to sustain an activist foreign policy, and thus the reasons to pursue such a policy must be explained to and accepted by the American people. Otherwise, if the war on terrorism proves to be not only long but more costly than Americans hope, the temptation to retreat from the world stage will be strong.

Although the outlines are not clear, advocates of alternative U.S. grand strategies during the last decade now seem inclined to superimpose these strategies on the campaign against terror. Advocates of greater restraint in U.S. foreign policy, often unfairly dubbed "neo-isolationists," argue that the United States must retaliate strongly for the September 11 attacks if it is to deter future attacks. But they are uninterested in what comes after, because they believe that the United States should do less in the world. If the United States is less involved, it will be less of a target. If it is less often a target, it needs less assistance to defend itself and its interests. This approach to terror is internally consistent, but it definitely does not defend an active U.S. world role.

Liberal internationalists seem much more interested in the process by which the campaign against terrorism is conducted. The United Nations must be involved at every step. Resort to law must take precedence over tactical advantage. Terrorists must be treated like criminals, not enemies: Police should apprehend them; courts should try them. Military action should occur seldom if at all, and it should always be precise. A state that sponsors terrorism, such as Afghanistan, should be diplomatically isolated, condemned at the UN, subjected to an arms embargo, and economically sanctioned in any way that does not harm the general populace. The United States should join the international criminal court, and as a token of its good intentions sign most of the treaties it has eschewed. This approach preserves a world role for the United States but, given the determination of the adversary and the foibles of other countries, seems doomed to failure.

Primacists have also tried to direct this campaign. Perhaps the strangest advice is rumored to have come from Paul Wolfowitz, the U.S. deputy secretary of defense. He seems to believe that the time is ripe to deal with all of the United States' enemies and problems in the Middle East and Persian Gulf and further consolidate an already dominant U.S. power position. Wolfowitz is reported to have recommended action against Iraq, Syria, and Hezbollah bases in Lebanon.²⁵ Violent regimes and movements they are, and no strangers to terrorism, but none of them seems to be connected to al-Qaeda and its maximalist objectives and methods. Were this to change, Wolfowitz's inclinations would make more sense. But going after all of them now looks too much like a script written by al-Qaeda propagandists; such attacks would surely cause states whose cooperation the United States needs to see the campaign as anti-Arab and anti-Islam, and sit this war out. Such a multifront attack might produce the very rebellions in Saudi Arabia, the other Gulf states, and Egypt that the United States hopes to prevent. This proposed four-front war is especially odd given that the Bush administration campaigned on the proposition that the U.S. military was incapable of dealing with two nearly simultaneous major regional wars.

One grand strategy advocated over the last decade is broadly consistent with the requirements of an extended counterterror war. That strategy, termed "selective engagement," argues that the United States has an interest in stable, peaceful, and relatively open political and economic relations in the part of the world that contains important concentrations of economic and military resources: Eurasia. This is an interest that others share. In this strategy, U.S. power is meant to reassure the vulnerable and deter the ambitious. This is a big project that requires a careful setting of priorities. Yet its objectives are limited: The project seeks neither power for its own sake, nor the wholesale reform of other states' domestic constitutions, nor a transformation of international politics. The U.S. position in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East is a central element of this strategy. Al-Qaeda aims to challenge this position. Its leaders believe that if the United States left the region, they could take power in the Gulf and in Egypt. Were this to happen, one can easily imagine several possible dangers: a war between Iraq and Saudi Arabia as Saddam Hussein tries to strangle the fundamentalist Islamic baby in the cradle before

25. Steven Mufson and Thomas E. Ricks, "Debate over Targets Highlights Difficulty of War on Terrorism," *Washington Post*, September 21, 2001, p. A25. The article depicts a policy fight between Secretary of State Colin Powell, the principal advocate of a policy focused on al-Qaeda, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz, "pushing for a broader range of targets, including Iraq."

its strangles him; war with Iran over security, religious, and nationalist issues; or war with Israel. Given the extreme destructiveness of the 1980–88 Iraq-Iran War (500,000 dead), which saw the use of chemical weapons and rocket attacks on cities—as well as the continued presence of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, and rocket delivery systems in the area—any of these possible wars could prove devastating for those in the region and harmful to those farther away. Moreover, any one of them would surely affect the production, distribution, and price of oil—still important to the global economy. Their political, military, and economic ripple effects would likely be felt globally, affecting other political relationships. The grand strategy of selective engagement does necessitate the campaign against al-Qaeda. The requirements of that campaign have already forced the Bush administration to act in ways that are more consistent with the strategy of selective engagement than they are with primacy.

The United States faces a long war against a small, elusive, and dangerous foe. That struggle must be pursued with discipline and determination if it is to be successful. The United States requires a strategy to guide its efforts, including the allocation of resources. That strategy must set priorities, because resources are scarce and this war will prove expensive. Significant changes in the U.S. national security establishment, including intelligence collection and analysis, military organization and equipment, and emergency preparedness, will prove essential. Finally, if the United States is to sustain both public and international support for the war on terrorism, it will need to resolve long-delayed questions about its future foreign and security policy through an extended discussion involving policymakers, policy analysts, and the American people.