

WERE I BIN LADEN

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SIX MONTHS AFTER THE DEMOLITION of the Twin Towers and the murder of nearly 3,000 people, I find myself extremely distressed by the Government's response to that terrorist attack.

First, there is not "a war." Only the U.S. Congress can declare the United States to be at war. At best, the present situation is a metaphorical war. But the term itself is fundamentally misleading to the public. Using the term "war" in this context is a political time bomb waiting to explode in the White House.

Metaphorically named wars do not have a felicitous history: consider the War on Crime, the War on Poverty, and the War on Drugs. They all failed because they all emphasized the use of power and force—massive interventions at the level of symptom—without much exploration of the underlying causes or the remedies to deal with those underlying causes.

This paper presents the principles, purposes, and necessary conditions for successful terrorism, from the terrorist point of view, in order to develop a different perspective on what needs to

be done at even the tactical and operational level. This paper also will highlight the limitations of our Government in anticipating, preventing and responding to terrorism.

The military has extreme difficulty in responding to terrorism because the relationship between the military and terrorism is drastically asymmetric. The U.S. military is dominated by high technology, is organized by chain of command, and its primary tool, aside from any deterrent value of threat of intervention, is the marshaling of military power against military targets. The thinking, experience, and reward structure within the military is framed around the kind of thinking that makes all that possible and effective. The consequence, after 9/11, is asymmetrical relationships. The weak, invisible, diffuse, uncertain, but clever enemy is almost irrelevant to those tools. It is as if one turned a boxer against a kung fu specialist.

There is a lot to be learned in an asymmetrical relationship but it is difficult and slow for a big hierarchical system to learn rapidly. Flexibility is not a strength of bureaucracy. Our civilian national security apparatus, in

its present state, runs into the difficulty of being largely made up of holdovers and recycles from the Cold War years. That puts them at an intellectual disadvantage because the Cold War has disappeared and they have not necessarily had any substantial experience in thinking about the new kind of threats we face. Furthermore, where one might expect fresh thinking in terms of national security strategies and the underlying bases of Islamic-initiated terrorism, U.S. military ideology blocks the way. I will develop that point further when we discuss the strategic thinking necessary to moving ahead against terrorism.

THINKING LIKE A TERRORIST

First, it is important to recognize that government, for its own bureaucratic and organizational reasons, throws many things into the terrorist hopper. For purposes of this discussion, lunatics, nuts, vengeful ex-employees, small-time ideologues, self-designated militias and organized criminals are not included as terrorists. This discussion frames itself around foreign-initiated, ideologically based terrorism. That is not to say that the other forms of violence are not important—

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quite the contrary. They are important, but they largely can be dealt with (i.e., identified, prevented, or limited) through ordinary police and legal practices. They will never disappear. Therefore the goal of government is to constrain them, and where possible to short-circuit and prevent them. But they are an entirely different set of animals from those in the international terrorist zoo.

Let us now review the principles of terrorism, noting that, to the best of my knowledge, no discussion of this has appeared in the public press. Consequently, the public at large is at sea with regard to understanding the rock-solid core principles of terrorism and the potential bases for U.S. response.

There are three goals to terrorism: Goal One is to demonstrate that government can not protect you. Put differently, it is to make people fearful, if not most fearful, of those things which they found in the past to be both safe and ordinary: going to work, going out for recreation, shopping.

Goal Two is to take terrorist actions which evoke an extreme response, and the more extreme that response, the better.

Goal Three is to use the extreme response as a mechanism for recruitment. Obviously, recruitment is not necessarily a rapid jump from position A to position B. It can involve gradations in steps: the evocation of sympathy, hostility to government, or questioning of government policies and actions.

For example, we see around the time of this writing the Middle Eastern Arab countries lining up, almost without exception, to argue the U.S.

down on any actions beyond saber rattling with regard to Iraq. We see, domestically, continual concerns being raised by civil libertarians about prisoners in Guantanamo's concentration camp. Three days before writing this I received an urgent letter, as I am sure thousands of others did, from the American Civil Liberties Union, calling for the need to protect democracy. Protect it against what? Against the extreme actions of our own government, in over-responding and responding outside of our traditional and well-accepted legal and cultural constraints in dealing with potentially or putatively threatening people. In addition to the above three goals, there are three conditions that must be met in a successful terrorist action:

First, there must be a target, ideally one with tremendous symbolic significance to underscore Goal One above. In the case of international terrorism, something highly symbolic like the Twin Towers is important because it will be a national symbol and it will be well understood globally. A small action in an isolated community or in a community that does not receive national press and has no eye-catching appeal to an international audience has little attraction for terrorists. An urban, rather than rural, setting for the terrorist act is likely to be more attractive in meeting Goal One.

The second condition for successful terrorist action is that the group must have the skills to achieve their objective. Considering that Middle Eastern people, terrorist or not, are likely to be recognizable on the basis of their facial features, their names, and so on, it suggests that only a few people will get here to be involved in perpetrating a terrorist act. Since they are coming from outside the country, they are

likely not to be using high-skill, high-tech materials because they can not be readily imported. They are most likely to use indigenous materials that can be gotten at readily and do not require elaborate facilities for preparation, organization and delivery.

The third condition is that the terrorists must have access to the target.

With those six goals and conditions in mind, let us turn to a sampler of activities that meet all those criteria and which, by and large, are outside the present public discussion of future terrorist activities.

TEN SPECIFIC IMPENDING TERRORIST DISASTERS

For convenience of presentation, we will write these from the point of view of the terrorist group. The reader will understand that this is in no way advocacy, but is only intended to indicate how a terrorist might think in terms of the six goals and conditions above.

1. Disrupt global business

Recognize that for bin Laden the great enemy of Islam is not just the United States. His enemy is much larger than that. It is all of the Western World, predominately Europe and the U.S., with the U.S. as a primary target. This makes the 9-11 hits very logical. Let's turn to what might be done in Europe and the United States.

To begin, inventory the hundred largest corporations in the world that are involved in global business. This is simple library work. Go a step further and determine which ones operate in a wide range of countries in World Two and World Three. With that inventory, select a number of companies based

on the scope of their activities and their worldwide prominence, to execute the following plan.

On some Tuesday afternoon assassinate the top official of one of those largest companies in one of the World Two or World Three countries. The next Tuesday, do the same at another company in another part of World Two or World Three. Repeat in week three. Then announce that as a plan for the indefinite future, the top person in each of those hundred largest companies operating in World Two or World Three is a candidate for assassination. In week four, week five, carry on the process.

What will the effect be? Panic among the World Two and World Three leadership of those corporations. The tension between personal safety and safety of their families, versus loyalty to the company, high incomes, and prominence in their work, will almost surely favor "Get me out of here!"

Completely upsetting the leadership outside the home country of all global corporations could be quite dramatic, disruptive, and costly.

2. Deadly panic

Killing people is often expensive. It is a lot cheaper to allow them to kill themselves. Find some harmless powdery material—talcum, chalk, or whatever. Then find an equally harmless, but obnoxious and unequivocally foul-smelling odorant which is not familiar. This is no great problem. Mix them together in hundred-pound lots and fly over a public event—the Pasadena Rose Bowl Parade, a big sports event, a New Year's Celebration or similar activity—releasing this harmless powder. In the resulting panic, people would kill

themselves attempting to flee through the limited number of narrow exits.

3. Radioactivity

There is great discussion of radioactivity. The discussion of combining an ordinary explosive device with radioactivity for disseminating over a large area in a detonation involves some degree of high technology.

If one can lay one's hands on ten to fifty pounds of radioactive material, preferably in the form of fine particles of dust, one can distribute that by plane via a spray device over the central areas of Chicago, New York, Seattle, St. Louis, or Paris. This will create fear with no visible damage, which is the worst kind of terror in that there is nothing obvious to do: Am I poisoned? Am I intoxicated? Have I been irradiated? How dangerous is this? How do I get advice? How do I clean myself up? Should I go to work? Is it safe to visit downtown? Has this stuff been tramped into the subway system? And on and on and on. And then when it comes to the public cleanup—how safe, how secure, and by what criteria? Will the contaminant be washed into a lake or a river? Will it have downstream effects? Will other communities drink the radioactive material?

Crisis and paralysis hit simultaneously.

4. Dangerous chemicals

The chemical industry has been put on alert. Great threats and possibilities lie there. The chemical industry uses, produces, handles, and sometimes delivers materials which are dangerous, often quite toxic, or even deadly.

Unless the chemical facility is in an urban or suburban area, it is difficult

to see how a terrorist action at a facility could create a significant event. Perhaps much more attractive within the goals and conditions discussed above would be something simpler:

It is not difficult to plot the movements of a chemical company's trucks through a metropolitan area. In Philadelphia or St. Louis, perhaps even in Cleveland, work out the routing, then plan to hijack five or six of those trucks, laden either with fresh chemicals or chemical waste, head to center city, and as the vehicles get within a half mile of center city, open the release valves and let the obnoxious, perhaps dangerous, material spread through the center of the city.

5. Poisoned air

With regard to large office buildings, doctoring the air ducts with an obnoxious, non-familiar odorant, meanwhile blocking exits with trucks rammed into the front and side doors will clearly meet the criteria above—simple, straightforward, using indigenuous supplies, and allowing people to kill themselves. Incapacitating the elevators would compound the effect but may not be essential.

6. Silence Washington, DC

Of a quite different sort, with high symbolic implications, is the goal of cutting off Washington DC from telecommunications for two or three days. How might that be done? There are node points in all telecommunications networks. There is a continual balancing act between redundancy—that is, overbuilding the system for safety and security—and high cost. In general, cost tends to win, and redundancy tends to be low.

With regard to telephony—and what is linked to that, the Internet—an

explosion of, or chemical or biological contamination of three to six key nodes would achieve the desired effect. The disablement wouldn't be complete, of course, but it surely would be dramatic and would fulfill Goal One to a primary degree.

7. Put servers out of service

Corporations of all sizes, from the largest down to midsize and even quite small ones, use corporate servers to handle their Internet communications. Those serving organizations operate in facilities that often are warehouse-size with hundreds and hundreds of devices to serve their clients in managing the flow of information. Again we encounter the balance between risks and redundancies. The contamination or explosions knocking out several of them, not just in one city, but simultaneously in several cities, could create business chaos and confusion and ultimately large losses among hundreds of corporations.

Explosions are easily photographed and highly dramatic, but contamination might be even more attractive because everything would seem to look the same, and yet, be unusable and untouchable.

8. Barking dogs do bite

Direct hits on people have their appeal. Consider the following:

When nerve gases for military uses were first developed, it became clear that we had to protect troops in the field, with extremely little time to act. Antidotes encapsulated in small cylinders, perhaps a half inch by two inches long, were supplied to troops. All one had to do was slam the end of that cylinder against one's thigh and

immediately it would self-inject it through the clothes, right into the body. Those spring-loaded injectors are manufactured in large quantities. There is no great secret about them. If they could not be procured, they could even be manufactured in the U.S. in a basement or in a garage.

Now what to do with them? One interesting possibility would be to load them with rabies virus. In six or eight cities around the United States, have a handful of completely low-skilled conspirators go through the city and greet people, comment on their dogs, how attractive they are, reach down and pet them, and in a very friendly way slap the dog with the injector. That's it. By coordinating the time in which this is done with the incubation period for rabies, one would find, throughout the country, micro-epidemics of rabies in multiple cities, making people frightened of their dogs—is it a victim?—making them frightened for their children who've played with their dogs, making them fearful for themselves, and demonstrating, again, how easily achieved are the goals of terrorism.

9. Cruise ships

Shifting scale to an enormous size, cruise ships which now hold thousands of people and might be the height of a ten or eleven story building, are extremely attractive targets.

Bin Laden is purported to own, or to have control over, some twenty or more ocean-going vessels. There are two distinctly different tactics here with the same outcome:

One is simply to ram the cruise ship and hope that it will sink. Even if it doesn't sink, the ramming will cause enough panic to create a mini-Titanic.

The other possibility is to pull alongside with your own ship loaded with ammonium nitrate. Ammonium nitrate is a standard material used in agriculture as fertilizer, but in large quantities it is explosive. It was the cause of the largest explosion in North America in World War Two, the famous Halifax explosion, in which a ship loaded with ammonium nitrate blew up in its harbor.

10. Miscellaneous

There are other more benign things that can be done but which in turn could portend a threat or a significant nuisance.

Just to suggest some of those: dispersing a bowel-infecting organism to create dysentery ("the runs") through the air conditioning systems in theaters, not in just one city, but simultaneously coordinated in ten cities and in fifty theaters.

Or simultaneously black out several cities. Keep in mind the notion of limited redundancy in physical networks.

Another possibility is the introduction into the food chain of hoof and mouth disease, which spreads rapidly among animals and really would create chaos in the agricultural sector.

Still another idea is to plant documents that look like they are conspiratorial, agitate the system to create leaks, and thereby generate more and more warnings and effectively wear the response system out by "crying wolf" too often.

What people are most frightened of are the exotic and the unfamiliar, the externally imposed, and the hidden, latent and uncertain.

SEVEN POLICY IMPLICATIONS

1. *Understand why they hate us*

The above agenda has several policy suggestions latent in it that government has, to the best of my knowledge, not adopted.

At the strategic level, address the question of why, in sixty countries which are predominately Islamic or have substantial Islamic populations, do so many people hate us? Why are there tens or hundreds of millions of people hating us? Until we understand that, there is no hope of reducing or constraining, much less eliminating, Islamic-based terrorism.

We had an interesting case in World War II of the fundamentally insightful book, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, which came far too late in the war to have been the great help that it should have been in understanding the Japanese mind. In World War II there were incidents that were outrageous but to a large extent reflected cultural misunderstanding and ignorance. The Bataan Death March, one of the early horrors of the war, came out of the Japanese expectation that the American Army would fight as they did, literally to the death. They made no plans for prisoners

Reciprocal of that, the U.S. found that the Japanese did not behave like the European and American armies and give up after suffering eighteen to twenty percent casualties, but instead fought to the death. That led to our extensive use of flamethrowers.

An implication that goes along with the notion of “Why do they hate us?” is the notion of “Why do they fight the way they do?” Around the time of the writing of this essay, three cultural

goofs, lapses, or failures occurred on the part of the United States.

First is the unexpected willingness of the Al Qaeda in Afghanistan to fight to the death. The surprise is in the asymmetry and the lack of understanding of the cultural background of the warriors.

Second is the failure to understand the Afghan culture as a warlord-dominated society. It is customary that, when a conflict is over and the matter is settled, former combatants embrace and go home. All is forgiven if not forgotten. This custom resulted in Taliban fighters—that is, warriors against the U.S. sponsored forces—being released as local battles ended but the larger conflict continued. Many of these men fled to fight again.

What kind of cultural advice are the military and the White House getting since that eventuality was not anticipated? And the biggest cultural lapse of all, so far, in this metaphorical war, has been the total absence of thinking on what to do with the thousands of Afghan prisoners, many of whom are now in a concentration camp in Guantanamo.

Apparently nobody looked ahead to the question of what will be the fate of those people. What will they be doing three, five or ten years in the future? This is a clear case of the urgent driving out the important in military thinking about national security. Cultural understanding is crucial to success.

2. *Abjure the use of “war”*

We must abjure the use of the word “war” because what is associated with other metaphorical wars is failure. Think of President Johnson and

Vietnam. Politicians simply can not acknowledge failure—it’s built into their genes. The only tool they have when guns and firepower fail, is more guns, more bullets, more men, and more firepower.

This was the failure of Johnson. His hubris, of course, not only led to our defeat in that so-called war, but also undermined his great potential as a domestic president.

3. *Think like terrorists*

It is most important that we think like terrorists and plan our responses accordingly, not just disperse our current resources and build more at breakneck speed without understanding what the real threats are.

4. *Prepare the public to expect terrorist acts*

We must prepare the public psychologically and materially for terrorist acts of many types. Not only those on a large national scale perpetrated by foreign-motivated ideologues, but also—separately and distinctly differently—those of the homegrown nuts, kooks, and hyper-aggressive special interest groups.

Much of terrorism must be seen as we see normal accidents, regretted but not earthshaking,

5. *Terrorist acts by good people*

We must also be aware that many activities that look like terrorism may have a different purpose from terrorism. Consider, for example, what the anti-nuclear people may do as the nation, over the next decade, not only extends the lifetime of existing nuclear power plants but begin building new ones. What will happen when their

deeply felt fears of the risk of nuclear power are ignored? Some of them may be motivated to sabotage a nuclear facility to punctuate their arguments with a real demonstration of a leak, a breach, a disaster.

That may already have happened with regard to the great mystery of anthrax in the mail. It may very well be that it was planned by an American microbiologist who wanted to highlight the significance of the potential of biological warfare by giving a minor demonstration which has already cost the nation probably twenty-five or fifty million dollars, delayed our mail, and most regrettable of all, taken the lives of the most innocent of people.

6. *Understand Islamic cultures*

We must assemble and organize a cadre of scholars to create the analog of *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. We must understand Islam, we must understand Islamic countries, and we must understand the actions that need to be taken to extinguish anti-Western beliefs and attitudes.

My own observation is that over the last five decades American policy, both in government and business, introduced Western ways, Western tools, and Western developments into Worlds Two and Three, often, if not always, with the endorsement and encouragement of the local governments. This Westernization has had the effect of making a small number of individuals wealthy, and delivering virtually nothing of significance to the mass population. This is the underlying basis of the hate of the West and toward the United States, throughout Islam.

If the assembly of scholars confirms that in detail—perhaps taking Iran as

the model example—that should lead to different government policies, different advice to business, and perhaps even to different constraints on international businesses in terms of plans, policies, programs and behavior, in Worlds Two and Three.

7. *Don't demonize*

Don't demonize the enemy. It's easy to do but far more difficult to retract, recant and heal the breaches that demonization creates when the trouble is over.

To illustrate the risks of metaphor, let me end with metaphorical advice: Rein in Ashcroft and hire a tutor for the White House.