Rethinking Sovereignty: American Strategy in the Age of Terrorism

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The two great systemic challenges of the twentieth century, costing millions of lives, billions of dollars and infinite lost opportunities, were fascism and communism. Both of these powerful ideological movements were fundamental challenges to the international state system, engaged in by what were, at least initially, pariah states, and requiring countervailing coalitions of highly industrialised status quo states to defeat them. The resulting international alliances and counter-alliances engaged in Manichean struggles in everything from hot wars on the battlefield to fastidiously parsed verbs at the negotiating table. Both were contests of ideas fought in traditional geopolitical formats, giving realists ample data points for calculations regarding national interest, sources of state power, and military balances. The post-enlightenment world of Newtonian concepts like balance of power and alliance bandwagoning was at least understandable, if not always stable or predictable.

The current era is characterised by a very different kind of threat: not a new one, by any means, but a threat that has the means to carry out massively destructive acts unbridled by the interests, form and structure of a state. The terrorist threat is a brute use of force, more understandable in a medieval context than in post-modern society. Although it does not compare directly to the military might gathered by the two great ideological movements, its implications are nonetheless potentially momentous. The use of terrorism implies an attempt to de-legitimise the concept of sovereignty, and even the structure of the state system itself. And responses to the threat must take forms that reach to an era that preceded this one and yet also move beyond our current concepts of statecraft.

Central elements of state sovereignty are the control of territory, population and the use of force. Terrorism undermines all of these elements, particularly the state's presumed monopoly over the use of force. That monopoly has been challenged since the creation of states, and its gradual undermining is not

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Survival, *vol. 44, no. 2, Summer 2002, pp. 119–39* © The International Institute for Strategic Studies

news: 'globalisation', drug cartels, multinational corporations and non-governmental organisations are widely recognised non-state phenomena of obvious and growing importance.[1] But what is troubling is the coupling of terrorism with ideological zeal and the technological means to make the tactic potentially devastating to mass civilian populations. That volatile combination effectively severs a state's populace from the direct or indirect control of a state. This evolution makes an old challenge newly troubling. The gradual transition at the end of the twentieth century away from direct state sponsorship of terrorism, and towards more amorphous groups, often having access to state resources but less and less likely to be under the control of the state itself, is a potentially serious development.[2] Obviously, states are far from helpless; but in an increasingly globalised international environment, the traditional state-centric means of responding to such a threat will not work and may even be counterproductive.

As has sometimes happened in international history, an event of tremendous significance has confounded the most earnest efforts to bracket the unknown and establish a force structure, alliance system and strategy to meet a vague, undefined future. The debates over military transformations, evolving post-Cold War alliance systems and criteria for humanitarian intervention, for example, have now been strangely recast. Perhaps it is good news, at least, that we will no longer have to struggle with the awkward label, 'the post-Cold War era'. In the 'age of terrorism,' the threat will be as much psychological as physical, requiring both resolve and subtle responses that modern democracies have found difficult to muster or sustain.[3] The Cold War was ultimately a struggle over ideology and ideas; the age of terrorism will also be a struggle over ideas, and the outcome will determine whether US leadership in the global system, even as *primus inter pares*, will continue. If the United States and its allies are to prevail, we must adjust our understanding of the predominant paradigm of international security, including the nature of the threat, the most promising responses to the threat and the likely counter-attacks by terrorists that may occur in this new conflict. We must also revise our assumptions about the making of a successful strategy in response.

The threat: will 'ends' obscure 'means'?

Although many think of it as a modern phenomenon, there is evidence that this violent means of political expression may be as old as organised human interaction.[4] Apparently cyclical in nature, terrorism seems to arise in relation to major international political watersheds, giving would-be terrorists a sense of opportunity as well as an increased vulnerability of societies to their methods and message.[5] In the twentieth century, for example, periods of high levels of terrorism coincided with the post-Second World War decolonisation internationally, and for US targets especially, the closing years of the Vietnam war and aftermath of the Gulf War. It is notable that terrorism correlates best throughout history with international political movements or changes, not major technological advances, although the tools available to potential terrorists have naturally influenced the forms of political violence used.[6]

The term 'terrorism' is notoriously difficult to define. For one thing, the term has evolved over the centuries since terrorist tactics were first used. It is worth recalling, for example, that modern-era 'terrorism' began during the French Revolution as a positive concept, referring to the means whereby the nascent revolutionary state consolidated power and imposed order.[7] It has evolved through numerous phases and meanings since then, but it is obviously a pejorative term in its current form.[8] Second, some historical actors who have committed or condoned 'terrorist' acts have achieved legitimacy in the international system; thus, the judgment of history might lead some cynically to conclude that acts are 'terrorist' only to the extent that they challenge the international status quo and fail.[9] But beyond those problems, the term is subjective and hard to define because it is usually associated with trying to create public fear, and thus terrorism is *intended* to be a matter of perception. Terrorists have no power if they do not inspire fear in the minds of their onlookers, either because that feeling of 'terror' enhances their rational political leverage or because it satisfies the irrational dictates of the fanatical religious doctrine they espouse – or both. The more outrageous, shocking, unexpected and attention-grabbing an attack is, the more the terrorist gains, or believes he gains, power.

Thus, terrorism at a minimum contains three important elements: the creation of fear; the seemingly random use of violence; and attacks on the innocent.[10] The latter point is particularly troublesome. Most agree that attacks on innocent human beings are wrong. But what if there is another, compelling political aim? Is such an attack ever justified? The answer to this question defines the main fault-line, between those who define terrorism as the act itself and argue that the political ends toward which the violence is directed are either secondary or irrelevant;[11] and those who define terrorism in terms of the longer-term consequences of the act and argue that the political motivations of those who resort to terrorism *are* important.[12] The latter would, in addition, argue that the victims of terrorist acts are often not 'innocent' at all, since they are directly or indirectly responsible for supporting the regime that frustrates or impedes those larger ends.

So, what is terrorism? Debates among interested scholars over the definition of terrorism are lengthy, legion and unenlightening, and they are touched upon only briefly here. Bruce Hoffman puts it simply: 'If one identifies with the victim of the violence … then the act is terrorism. If, however, one identifies with the perpetrator … it is not terrorism'.[13] But this is an ultimately frustrating perspective if one is charged with analysing the phenomenon – or, much more importantly, protecting one's citizens against it or putting together a cohesive international coalition to fight it. In most academic discourse, terrorism is identified as the act itself, and the ends towards which violence is directed are de-emphasised. Identifying an act removes the moral ambiguity inherent in an approach oriented towards the belief that 'the end justifies the means', and places a more useful and intellectually satisfying boundary around a field of inquiry. The alternative is to engage in endless debates over the justification of motivations in individual cases (which some academics and commentators are

nonetheless wont to do).[14] Thus, this essay also puts the emphasis on the act itself, and for the purposes of this article, terrorism is the sudden use or threat of use of violence against innocent targets for political ends.

But there are many such political acts of violence in the world, now and in recent decades. Are they all equally threatening? Now that the United States has been most painfully and spectacularly targeted, perhaps Americans are just engaging in ethnocentric whining. Many countries have handled the problem of terrorism, both domestically and internationally, for decades. Is there really something about the evolution of terrorism that makes it uniquely threatening to the international system now?

Why terrorism is increasingly dangerous

To answer this question, we must understand more about the general experience of recent terrorist organisations, particularly their characters and motivating ideologies. The categories of terrorists that are traditionally employed by those who study the field are left-wing terrorism, right-wing terrorism, ethno-nationalist/separatist terrorism and religious or 'sacred' terrorism. All four types have enjoyed eras of prominence in the twentieth century, with left-wing terrorism intertwined with the Communist movement,[15] right-wing terrorism drawing its inspiration from fascism,[16] and the bulk of ethno-nationalist/separatist terrorism accompanying the wave of decolonisation in the post-Second World War years.[17] As can be seen from the categories, terrorism has accompanied the most powerful political ideas in the twentieth century; but it is the fourth of these categories that has been most troubling to experts in recent years and could pose unprecedented dangers in the twenty-first century.

'Sacred' or religious terror is also the oldest recorded type of terrorism, with a history going back at least to the Jewish Zealots (or 'Sicarii') of the first century AD and arguably earlier.[18] Despite its nomenclature, religious terrorism actually mixes both political and religious motivations and is, as a result, probably the most dangerous – it has open-ended or less 'rational' aims, is less predictable and, in recent years at least, has tended to aspire to cause more casualties than the other types. Religious terrorism represents a dangerous combination of political aims animated by the ideological fervour of a deeply spiritual commitment – either real or (depending on the group – or even the individual) contrived. In this type of terrorism, the 'audience' may or may not have human form, and the aims may or may not reflect a rationality that is obvious to anyone but the 'divinely inspired' perpetrator (or his followers).

Experts in terrorism have been warning of the growth of religious (or pseudo-religious) terrorism for years; the first attempt to bomb the World Trade Center in 1993, as well as the Aum Shinrikyo cult's sarin attacks on the Tokyo subway in 1995, gave that threat material form. In combination with evidence of biological and chemical weapons programmes in Iraq and the former Soviet Union, as well as worry about nuclear weapons and material

becoming available following the break up of the Soviet Union, there was ample reason to fear that religious terrorism, with its pursuit of open-ended ends, in combination with more widely available and destructive means, might result in unprecedentedly destructive attacks. Add to this the fact that religious organisations, in separating the 'believers' from others, find it easier to dehumanise their potential victims and are sometimes not as constrained by concerns about the reaction of human 'constituents', and the threat is even more potentially dangerous.[19] Thus, to understand the evolution of the terrorist threat to the international system, it is helpful to look both forwards and backwards: forwards to the potential use of massively destructive weapons in new ways, and backwards to the ideological motivations that would drive a group to kill large numbers of civilians.

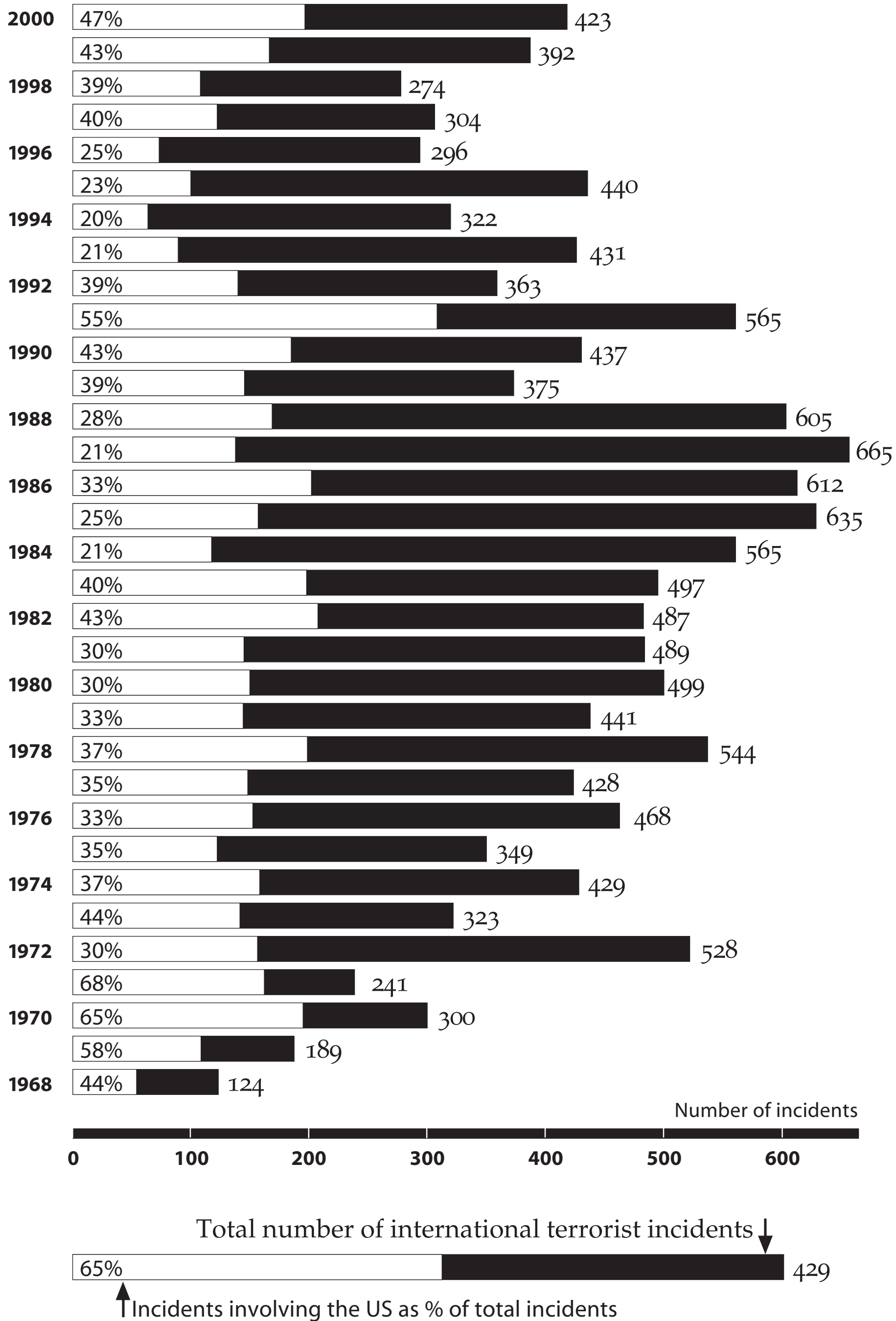
Still, when looking at the trends immediately before 11 September, the evidence was mixed. The good news was that there were fewer attacks overall: internationally in the 1990s, the number averaged below 400 per year, whereas in the 1980s, the number of incidents per year was well above 500 (Figure 1).[20] But the bad news, at least for the United States, was that the percentage of international attacks against US targets or US citizens was increasing, from about 20% in 1993–5 to almost 50% in 2000 (Figures 2).[21] There was also evidence of a more global character to terrorist networks, including a gradual shift from the Middle East to Central and South Asia, the Balkans and the Transcaucus. And throughout the world, the average number of casualties per incident was also greatly increasing (Figure 3).[22] The increase in numbers of casualties per incident, as well as the 1995 sarin-gas attack in the Tokyo subway, led to an argument that terrorist groups, seeking more dramatic and deadly results, would be increasingly inclined to use chemical, biological and nuclear technologies.[23] In any case, there seemed to be an evolution going on: well before 11 September, there was concern that international terrorism might be entering a new, more dangerous phase.

Obviously, that concern was well-founded. For all we know, the al-Qaeda network – whose audience is the Muslim man on the street in South Central Asia, the Middle East, South East Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and even in the developed world – is hatching a plot to use nuclear or biological weapons. Al-Qaeda *needs* a holy war, a 'crusade', if it is to galvanise opinion to its side of the legitimacy debate, and it has proven its willingness to resort to acts of 'total war' to do so.

Target: legitimacy

Terrorists have for many years shown a preference for the jargon of warfare. They declare war on the opposition and present their tactics as the only means available for a much weaker adversary arrayed against the asymmetrically strong resources of the state or states. Declaring war provides greater legitimacy and justification for the actions of the terrorists. It aims to establish a moral equivalency between terrorist acts – such as crashing civilian airlines into commercial buildings – and armed national forces engaging in a military

Figure 1 International terrorists incidents,1968–2000



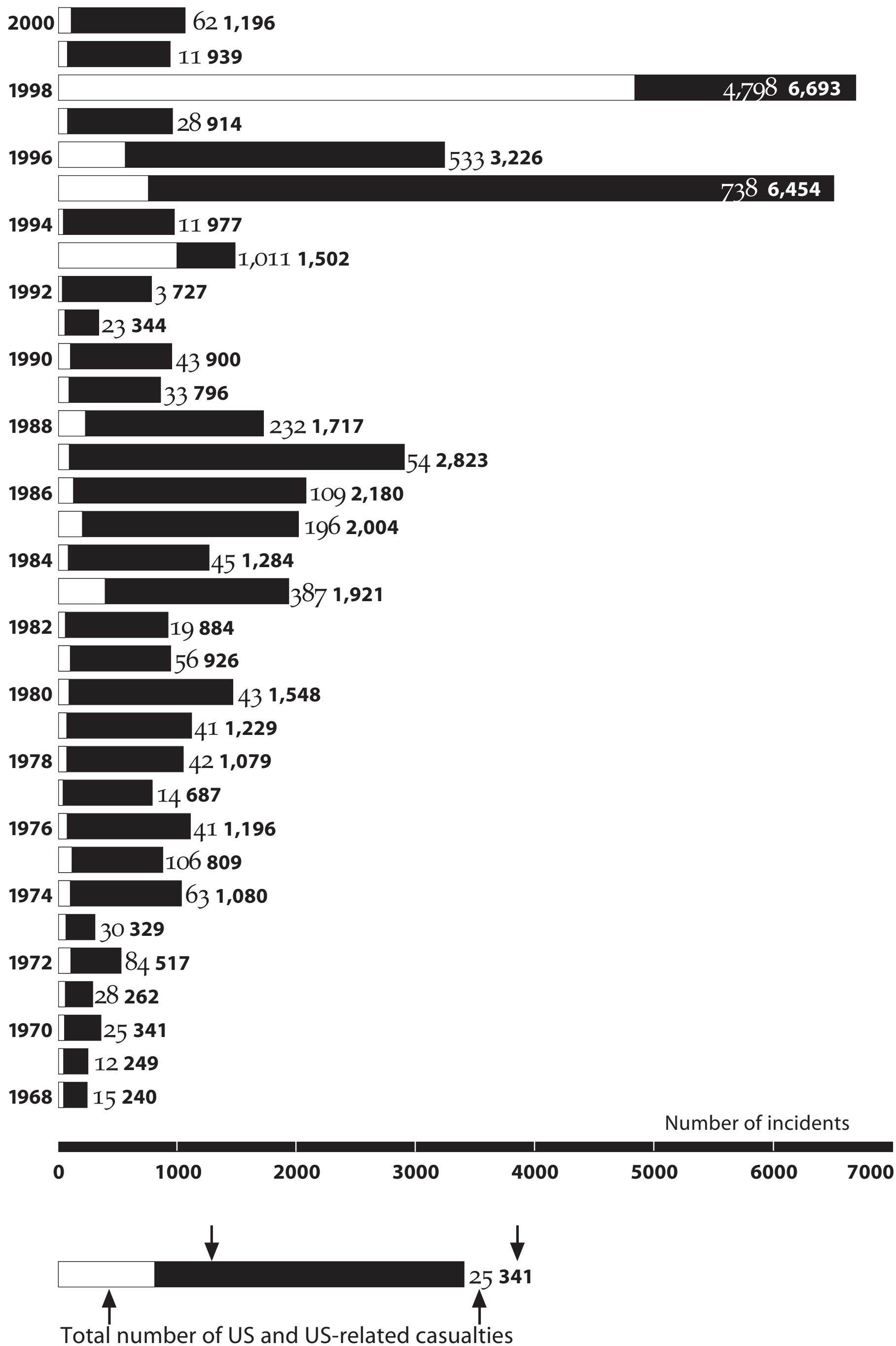
Source Table compiled by author, based on data from *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, annual publication of Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, US State Department.

campaign against Iraq. This is a deliberate appeal to both legal and moral norms for the use of military force in the international community – norms that for the most part transcend culture, state and religion, and that justify the use of violence only under certain conditions. At the heart of terrorism is an appeal to legitimacy, and that is the centre of gravity that the West must attack.

In an effort to attain moral legitimacy, terrorists employ traditional concepts like those embodied in the 'just war' tradition. Above all, the resort to 'war' must be motivated by a 'just cause', a concept that has been historically based upon foundations such as the requirement to defend innocent people under attack, to punish evil-doers, to engage in self-defence, or to participate in a holy or ideological war.[24] While the just war tradition will not be discussed in any detail here, it should be noted that an important requirement is that every use of force be undertaken by a competent authority. Over the centuries from the establishment of the Christian tradition, this meant first the church, then the sovereign, and finally the state. While clearly under attack in recent decades, the concept of a state monopoly on the use of force has been an important norm in the modern state system, and the adoption of military jargon and declaration of war by terrorist groups is another deliberate attempt to achieve legitimacy. The Islamic tradition, while distinct from Christian just war tradition, is largely in agreement with it, and Islamic states have had no difficulty reconciling the Islamic concept of 'humanitarian law' with the laws of war represented, for example, in the Geneva and Hague Conventions. The similarities are much more important than the differences;[25] and the importance of appealing to this international norm has only increased in recent years. Terrorist organisations, whether Islamic, Christian, Jewish or secular, realise the importance of normative concepts in establishing their own legitimacy.

Having attempted to establish that there is a just cause for going to war, the terrorist then challenges traditional restraints upon the use of force within a war (*jus in bello*). Christian just war tradition requires that every effort be made to avoid harming civilians or non-combatants, and that the types of weapons used in combat be proportional to their purpose, that is, the use of excessive, unnecessary amounts of force is unjust. Islamic concepts are quite consistent with these requirements as well, including, for example, a requirement to fight only those who fight you (that is, combatants), and not harming children.[26] Obviously, however, terrorist organisations tend to emphasise the requirements to go to war (*jus ad bellum)* more than the guidelines for behaviour within war (*jus in bello)*, since the use of force by terrorists is *a priori* intended to be directed at a larger audience. The targeted population (both direct and indirect victims), are to be shocked and intimidated, the faithful are to be whipped into a heightened state of confidence and fervour, and the neutral are possibly to be swayed to the cause. Following careful strictures about protecting the innocent and avoiding mutilation would undermine the central purpose of demonstrating the use of force for broad political effect. Thus, at the very heart of what makes an organisation terrorist, and what makes an act terrorism, is the priority placed on concepts of *jus ad bellum* (however wrongly construed) at the expense of *jus in bello.* The purpose is to demonstrate a

Figure 2 Total and US casualties from international terrorist attacks



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dramatic change in the flow of history, in a sense, toward the rightness of the terrorists' cause. Yet, the target of this war, or more accurately, campaign, is not traditional military capabilities but the *legitimacy* of the terrorists. They are not claiming to be powerful; if anything, they are using the obvious asymmetry of US capabilities to add to their perceived 'moral' power among potential supporters. If the campaign is truly against those who are 'evil,' then the US and its allies must, as much as possible, limit the response to those who are guilty. Widening the campaign to numerous countries risks expanding the objectives of the war on terrorism well beyond our means to achieve success. This is in large part because the depth and breadth of support for terrorism – popular legitimacy – could multiply if our over-strenuous and visible and lethal means create an international backlash against the campaign. In such a scenario, we would also be changing who we are and what we represent as men and women.

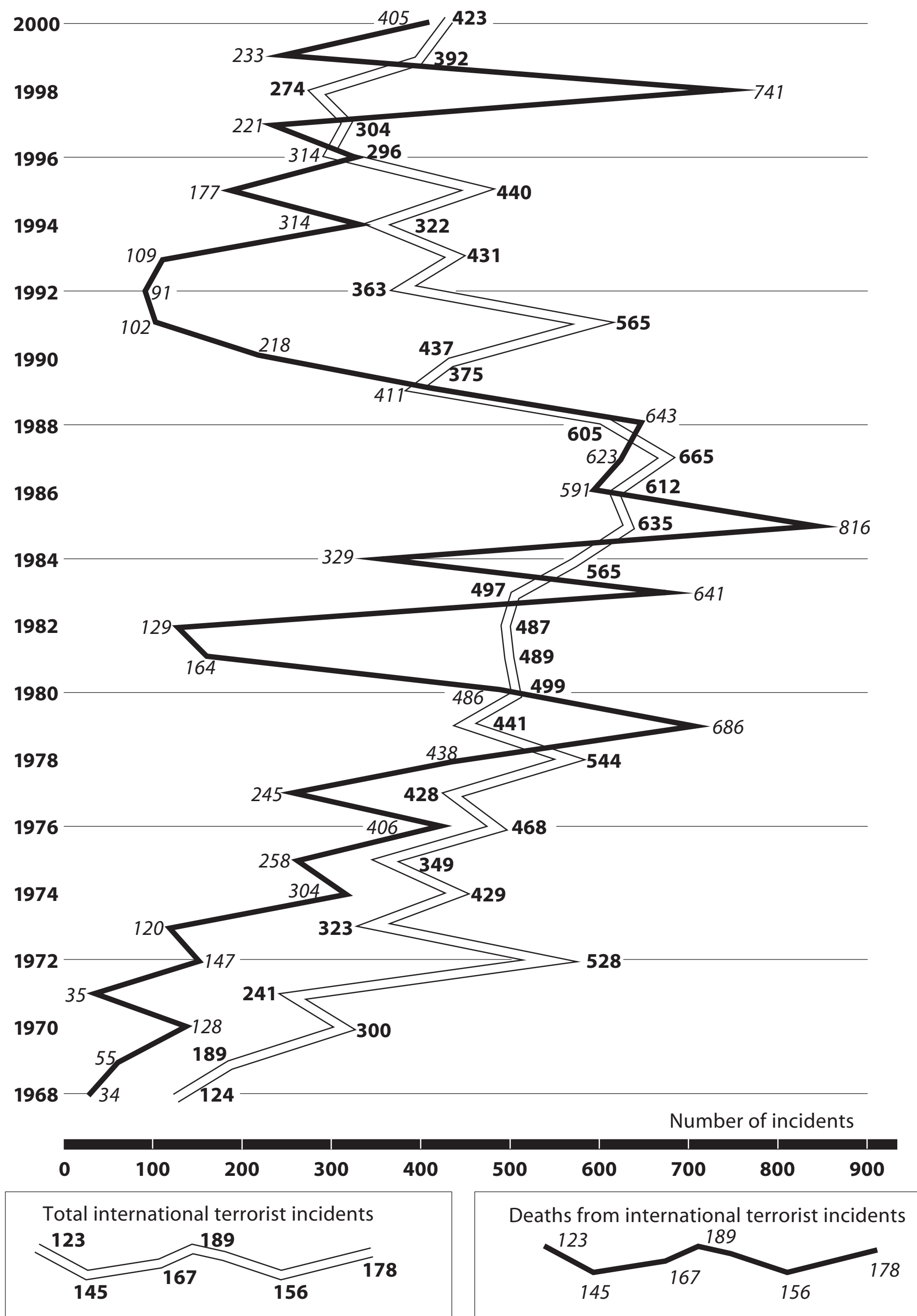
In more practical terms, however, the use of military force has become more difficult because of evolutions in the threat. Terrorist groups are increasingly amorphous, more likely to use evolving information technologies and to rely less upon traditional organisational structures, thus making it much harder to find targets to attack militarily. Sometimes perpetrators come together temporarily only for the purpose of attacking a target, as was the case in the first World Trade Center bombing and the Oklahoma City attack. The dispersal of al-Qaeda before the US bombing, for example, shows the difficulty of identifying and tracking down leaders of terror. Changes in the motivations of terrorists have also complicated the picture for the use of military force, since potential supporters of fanatical religious groups are more likely to see military attacks as further confirmation of their absolutist view of the world.

If the terrorists are militarily destroyed, the legitimacy of their cause may still exist and even become stronger, depending on how the operation is perceived. Dramatic cruise missile attacks, for example, play into the mindsets of developing countries (and even of some US allies) affirming the belief that the US is too powerful, takes too many unilateral actions and has too much sway in the world. The ironic result is an overall increase in political sympathy for the terrorists or their cause. The history of the use of military force against terrorist organisations is not encouraging: military responses, while disruptive in the short run, tend to drive terrorists underground, to encourage innovation, to engender sympathy and, sometimes, even build support for the 'underdog'. The point is not that swift and decisive uses of force are irrelevant: far from it. Instead, the argument is that effective counter-terrorist policy must be placed in a larger strategic context, in which longer-term consequences are calculated. This is not football, it is martial arts: the terrorists' goal will be to find points of leverage, to keep the US and its allies off balance, and to use the alliance's greater military strength against them.

American strategic culture

The United States is ill-equipped by culture, history and bureaucratic structure to respond effectively to this new kind of strategic threat.[29] Although

Figure 3 Numbers of international terrorist incidents and associated deaths



Source Table compiled by author, based on data from *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, annual publication of Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, US State Department.

recriminations have been numerous in the months since 11 September, there is nothing new about the failure to foresee and prepare for the full implications of this threat: the United States is notoriously reactive in its making of national strategy.[30] Despite repeated efforts to institutionalise a process of long-range strategic thinking, from the interwar years to the post-Second World War years to the Cold War to the post-Cold War era, American history is dominated by the theme of the United States' inability or unwillingness to organise its assets well until they are arrayed against a specific threat.[31] The murder of some 3,000 innocent people on US soil was a galvanising event that above all mobilised American political will – an extremely powerful force in US history, albeit often poorly focused and aimed more toward short-term action than longer-term planning.[32]

It is in this sense that the events of 11 September are like the oft-cited 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor as well as the 1950 North Korean invasion of South Korea: watershed events in American history with a catalysing effect on American society. For many months before Japanese bombers engaged in a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, US planners in Washington had known about the seriousness of the threat posed by international fascism; but it took a tragedy on American soil to engender the political support for the United States to enter the war. The result was one of the greatest military mobilisations in history.[33] Similarly, the strategy of containment of the Soviet Union, initially crafted by George F. Kennan and then reformulated by Paul Nitze in NSC-68, would never have resulted in the massive military mobilisation of the Cold War without the dramatic North Korean invasion of South Korea. In the space of a few months, the United States defence budget increased by 257%, and the United States sustained an unprecedented level of mobilisation for the remainder of the Cold War.[34]

Likewise, the threat of terrorism against the United States has been worrying policy-makers for years, and there have been numerous panels, reports, task forces, and committees that have sounded an alarm – most notably, the Bremer Commission, the Gillmore Commission, and the Hart–Rudman Commission reports.[35] But in the context of US foreign- and defence-policy priorities, terrorism was seen as one of several important competing priorities.[36] In the domestic context, tracking down potential terrorists continued to be balanced very carefully and properly against the presumption against unwarranted invasion of privacy and imposition on civil liberties.[37] There was a cost to making the United States safer from terrorist acts – a cost that would have required considerable political capital.

Most security experts agreed that there was clearly a threat, but in evaluating how serious it was, the obvious question was 'compared to what?' There was an increase of US funding for anti-terrorist and counter-terrorist measures of about 40% between financial year (FY)98 and FY01,[38] but policy-makers were also focused on the rising China threat, the implications of NATO expansion, the ongoing and immediate threat of instability in the Balkans and the persisting and worrisome spectre of chemical, nuclear and biological weapons proliferation. These concerns fit better into the existing intellectual

framework of US strategy. Policy-making is about making choices, often between undesirable alternatives, with unclear information, and with insufficient resources. There may have been lapses in intelligence, but with the knowledge we now have about the tragedy that followed, it is difficult to be objective about decisions made before 11 September.[39] On the basis of American experience, and judging by the trends that were observed in types and numbers of attacks, the situation was ambiguous at best. And there were not a few well-respected terrorism analysts who concluded from the available information that the threat to the United States was actually declining.[40]

Of course, it was the appalling events of 11 September that drove the threat to the top of the national agenda and set off a huge mobilisation of American and international capabilities to meet the threat.[41] The important question now is whether that mobilisation, driven by passion and a need for action, will take the most appropriate form for the new international era.

In the twentieth century, American strategic thinking was primarily shaped by the growth of, first, air power, and then nuclear power. The fundamental assumptions were that strategic weapons were useful for either deterrence or defence, but not often both. Reflective of a capitalist society, American strategic thinking continues to prefer a kind of cost-benefit analysis: deterrence, a psychological concept on which much of its Cold War posture was founded, meant discouraging the enemy from taking military action by posing a prospect of cost and risk that outweighed the enemy's potential gain.[42] If deterrence failed, then the requirement for defence became relevant, meaning reducing one's own prospective costs and risks. Defence focused on an enemy's capabilities. Throughout the Cold War and beyond, American strategic thinking favoured this kind of rational calculus of loss and risk, minimised for the US and maximised for the enemy. And by the end of the twentieth century, that is how the United States became accustomed to facing the prospect of major interstate war: especially after the Vietnam War, the ultimate purpose was to raise the enemy's costs and risks and lower those of the US, either by deterring the use of force to begin with (which was preferable, of course) or massively responding with overwhelming force when aggression did occur.

Now the US is facing an entirely different type of threat, one that cannot be approached with familiar American strategic thinking (although many are trying).[43] It is extremely difficult to raise the costs of terrorism significantly, since terrorists only need a few successes on the margins to make a political point. In the case of the al-Qaeda network, for example, the symbolic benefit of the massive attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon (admittedly not marginal events) far outweighed any individual 'rational man' calculus of cost, as was seen in the willingness of the hijackers to die with their victims. More to the point, the costs of disruption and defence engaged in by the United States – both before and after 11 September – have been and always will be much greater than the costs of opportunistic terrorist attacks.[44]

Likewise, the American proclivity for technological solutions is precisely the wrong formula for success against a terrorist threat. As mentioned earlier, the

record of terrorist activity demonstrates a correlation between political or ideological movements and terrorism, not technological advances and terrorism. While terrorists have indeed shown a willingness and capability at times to innovate both tactically and strategically, technology is not the driving force behind their activity.[45] Effective responses, therefore, cannot be focused upon technologically driven military campaigns that miss the mark of the political 'weapon' of the terrorist organisation. Without an audience to which to appeal, terrorists have much less power over time. Yet, the military campaign that the United States seems temperamentally and bureaucratically compelled to carry out is likely to enhance and perpetuate the anti-Western, anti-secular anti-materialist hatred that the al-Qaeda network is disseminating.

Unlike earlier eras, today terrorist networks increasingly have the capability to manipulate their state sponsors, so the calculus of leverage has changed. That is not to overstate the power of the networks – but power in its traditional state-centric context is no longer the currency of the day. The hallmarks of state power – bombers, nuclear mega-tonnage, tanks and troops, specifically, or population, territory and wealth more generally – are not the ideal weapons in this fight. They may even be undesirable vulnerabilities. Terrorism cannot be defeated solely in the military sense, for all it takes is one surviving charismatic terrorist leader in the appropriate political circumstances to strike back with ruthless abandon against the citizens of the state. Even one martyred charismatic leader will do, if the networks endures. Potential Western targets will always be available, as long as terrorists can perpetuate even a twisted form of legitimacy. And more devastating attacks on the territory of the United States or its allies may result. A war occurs between co-belligerents: this is not so much a 'war' as a hostage-taking situation – and the hostages are American and other Western civilians.

Ultimately terrorists are spoilers – we cannot be safe everywhere, all the time. The use of anthrax, even if not linked to al-Qaeda, shows how spoilers can disrupt society and shape debate. In this sense, at least, the threat is more akin to a criminal threat, like piracy or murder, engaged in by rogue actors. And the US, while in traditional respects the most powerful nation on earth, has not been very effective in recent years at conducting operations against non-government actors or even, in some cases, individuals. In the late twentieth century, the terrorist threat evolved much more quickly than US strategic, political and budgetary processes, and the US must now scramble to reorient its resources.

How US strategy must adapt

The Taliban has been destroyed, but the United States and its allies still have an enormous set of problems, including direct responsibility for a new post-Taliban Afghan government faced with myriad challenges, not the least of which is pervasive food insecurity. Before 11 September, the United States was not responsible for the horrendous situation of the millions of starving Afghan civilians: indeed, even as al-Qaeda was plotting the murder of thousands of

office workers in New York and Washington DC, the United States was the largest donor of aid to Afghanistan, contributing $9 out of every $10 of food aid to the Afghan people, and was foremost in urging the Taliban government to be more responsive to the condition of its own population.[46]

But replacing the Taliban government, while necessary, was not sufficient and does not 'win' the war on terrorism. Whatever has been achieved militarily, if the US and its allies do not apply dramatic measures to remedy the broader humanitarian situation, including massive economic assistance unseen since the years immediately following the Second World War, they will lose the campaign against international terrorism on political and cultural grounds, and the results will be no less devastating to Western security. Initial signs with respect to financial pledges for 2002 and 2003 are at least encouraging, but it is hard to say whether they will persist over the long-term.

This is a struggle that plays to a comparative disadvantage. US political and cultural sophistication lag far behind its military technological capabilities. This is *not* a clash of civilisations; however, the United States will make it into one if the traditional elements of state sovereignty – territory, population and the use of force – continue to be the lens through which it views and responds to an international terrorist threat.

Terrorists have no power without political and financial support. Ultimately, the foundation of the threat arises not from any military capabilities, including even weapons of mass destruction, that they may amass, but from the sympathisers who are essential to their survival. The al-Qaeda network, for example, has the capability to harm the United States most seriously if its message resonates with a broad audience of supporters. That is not to say that more Americans will not be targeted and killed in future terrorist attacks; but that in the long term, neutralising the threat requires comprehensive policy tools, not military force alone. Indeed, the challenge is more a matter of marginalising the message than removing a government, capturing a criminal or occupying a territory.

The United States has a problem-solving, materialistic culture, currently characterised by a crisis mentality, high levels of anxiety and an unrealistic belief in the ability to eliminate risk. Yet, the best attributes in responding to terrorism are patience, a phlegmatic attitude, a long attention span, consistency and a more realistic assessment of risks. Over time, a major element in the US response to international terrorism will be a psychological adjustment in the mindset of the average American, learning to live with a more reasonable understanding of the risks of terrorism. That is not to say that there must be resignation or an admission of defeat; but the history of terrorism indicates that the threat has existed long before 11 September and it will be continue to exist long afterwards. Although serious and threatening, terrorism is not a 'war' that can be 'won' but a problem that must be managed and minimised. Short-term attempts at a complete victory will result in a political backlash that will undermine any success in the long run. In short, while it is necessary to expand the campaign against terrorism globally, any use of military force must be

limited to very precise targets. If the objective requires the removal of another regime, then the removal must be justified publicly, widely considered legitimate, the action swift and decisive, and the public braced for asymmetrical terrorist responses. More specifically, no matter how heinous the state regime, in the campaign against international terrorism, there must be a clear connection to the attacks of 11 September, not just a motivation to remove a longstanding threat or settle a longstanding score. At this point, a conventional campaign against Saddam Hussein's Iraq meets none of these criteria and risks involving the US in a multi-front war that will stretch our strategic resources, undermine the allied coalition, alienate moderate Arab regimes (and more importantly, their citizens), and over time, strengthen international terrorist networks. There may be other reasons to attack Iraq; however, justifying such a conventional campaign as part of a war on terrorism is counterproductive and astrategic, given the new era of international terrorism that we currently face.

To be most effective in this new era, the United States needs to rethink the so-called revolution in military affairs, which focused on advanced technology in intelligence, command and control, and precision-guided weaponry, and instead develop better capabilities in unglamorous areas like human intelligence assets, long-term genuine cooperation with indigenous and allied forces, larger and more diverse special forces, better psychological operations and reasonable homeland security. More to the point, to succeed over time in this campaign, the United States must institute a revolution in *diplomatic* affairs, including increased foreign assistance to politically volatile areas like Central Asia, better long-term coordination of intelligence with allies, more cooperation in international criminal law enforcement, better public diplomacy, improved language capabilities, better education in regional studies and active long-term coalition-building.

There are various paths to achieve these objectives. But specific actions that should and should not be taken by American officials include the following. First, Washington must strengthen its military capability to operate in both remote and urban areas with small numbers of elite forces properly trained for the particular environment into which they may operate. These forces, often out of the headlines, are necessary for counterterrorist operations. At the same time, the military must restrict its far-flung military operations to specific, achievable goals and resist a natural temptation to try to 'fix' what could be an endless set of problems in countries from the Philippines to Yemen to Somalia.

Second, the US should not delude itself that Saddam Hussein is a principal in the war on terrorism. He is an evil leader, but his proliferation threats and crimes against humanity are different from the religious terrorist threat of al-Qaeda. One fear is that Washington will eventually settle on the 'next war' and turn integrated policy tools over to one big military force, and in doing so, lose sight of why it embarked upon the mission in the first place.

Third, the United States, working in tandem with key allies from the UK to Japan, must disable the enabling environment of terrorism. To do this

successfully requires not a new Marshall Plan per se, but rather, a clear set of high-priority countries in which a varied set of policy instruments – including targeted economic aid, educational initiatives, law-enforcement training, more effective financial controls, to name a few – are employed to close training and revenue-raising sanctuaries for terrorists and to reduce the pool of potential recruits. Among specific policy steps are technical assistance to help host governments bolster their institutions, expand basic education programmes, train local law-enforcement officers, and to provide support for civil society and the rule of law to serve as a check on corruption and rampant disregard for social ills that could breed sympathy for terrorism.

The end of US primacy?

The age of terrorism is a new era in international relations, where the traditional tools of power politics will be less important than in the past. While we have obviously not seen the last of inter-state war, war between organised states will no longer be the main driving force that it has been in the last 400 years or so. Ideology will be; and the underlying legitimacy of the ideology will provide the centre of gravity for each side. That is not to say that this era will have less conflict – quite the opposite – but war between sovereign states will no longer be the focal point. We have already seen evidence of a remarkable shift: states are entering coalitions not to fight a traditional 'war' or to deter such a war fought by other states or coalitions. They are aligning in surprising ways to fight the major non-state threat that has successfully targeted the leading state power: the United States. There is a new relationship evolving between former rivals like Russia and the United States, and China and the United States, and the guiding principle around which they align is not military power but the stability and integrity of the state system itself against this untraditional and unprecedentedly dangerous threat. There will continue to be frictions and differences within the new state-to-state relationships; but the common interests of the members will nonetheless be more powerful, politically and militarily, than the hatred and potential disorder that this fanatical international 'sacred' terrorism represents.

International terrorism is not dangerous because it can defeat us in a war, but because it can potentially destroy the domestic contract of the state by further undermining its ability to protect its citizens from direct attack. The United States and its allies must win in the conventional ways, but the greatest danger is not defeat on the battlefield but damage to the integrity and value of the state. And the best way to meet this threat is to broaden the concept of appropriate means and include broad appeals to fundamental shared values, emphasis on the murderous nature of the act, careful targeting and marginalising of those who are connected to the act, and compassion, aid and protection of the innocent – in Afghanistan, the United States and across the globe.

Notes

1 Civil war, ethnic conflict, international crime, and many other sources of violence in the globalised community are also obvious threats to the state's monopoly on the use of force; but none of these has thus far shown the ability to wreak large-scale destruction in a single incident primarily directed against an uninvolved civilian population located far from the territory of the perpetrators.

2 Although states have long been supportive of terrorist activity, we are now seeing an evolution from state sponsors with leverage over their terrorist 'clients' to international terrorist networks with increasing leverage over the associated states. See Audrey Kurth Cronin, 'Is State Sponsorship an Outdated Concept?' unpublished paper, Spring 2002. See also Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin, 'The Terror', *Survival*, vol. 43 no. 4, Winter 2001.

3 Indeed, the phrase 'The Age of Terrorism' itself is not really new. See, for example, Walter Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism* (Boston: Little Brown, 1987); and Adrian Guelke, *The Age of Terrorism and the International Political System* (London and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995). But applying it to the early twenty-first century is.

4 The Zealots, or 'Sicarii', are usually considered the first recorded terrorist movement, active between AD 66–73. See Walter Laqueur, *Terrorism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), pp. 7–8; and David C. Rapoport, 'Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions', *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 78 (1984), pp. 658–677.

5 Rapoport, *Ibid*

6 *Ibid*

7 Bruce Hoffman, *Terrorism Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 15.

8 *Ibid,* Chapter 1.

9 The usually cited examples include Menachim Begin and Israel's Irgun, and Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress, although many others could arguably be added.

10 R. G. Frey and Christopher W. Morris, 'Violence, Terrorism and Justice', Chapter 1 of R. G. Frey and Christopher W. Morris (eds), *Violence, Terrorism and Justice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 3.

11 These would follow the tradition of Immanuel Kant, arguing that the killing of innocents is never justified. See Frey and Morris, 'Violence, Terrorism and Justice'.

12 These would follow consequentialist thinkers (that is, those who judge the inherent legitimacy of an act on the basis of its consequences). I do not include the third category laid out by Frey and Morris, which they call ethical 'contractarianism,' because I do not find this philosophy as prevalent as the other two in the writings of terrorism experts. *Ibid*.

13 Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 31.

14 On the difficulty of defining terrorism, see, for example, Omar Malik, 'Enough of the Definition of Terrorism!' Royal Institute of International Affairs paper (London: RUSI, 2000). Alex P. Schmid, *Political Terrorism: A Research Guide* (New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1984), spends over 100 pages grappling with the question of a definition, only to conclude that there is no one universally acceptable definition.

15 Here we would include groups such as the Second of June Movement, the Baader-Meinhof Group, the Red

Brigades, the Weathermen and the Symbionese Liberation Army.

[16] Among right-wing groups would be some members of the American militia movements like the Christian Patriots, other neo-Nazi organisations and the Ku Klux Klan. They tend to be less well organised and more impulsive in their violence than were the left-wing terrorist groups of the 1970s and 1980s.

[17] The list here would be extremely long, including organisations as different as the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, the Basque separatist party and the PLO and the IRA (and their various factions).

[18] Rapoport, 'Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions'. Some people include the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BC as the earliest documented terrorist attack. This would argue for purely politically motivated terrorism being the oldest type; but this example seems more an act of criminality than terrorism.

[19] There have been many books and articles published on this issue in recent years. Among the best are: Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God* (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2000); Jessica Stern, *The Ultimate Terorrist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); and Richard A. Falkenrath, Robert D. Newman, and Bradley A. Thayer, *America's Achilles' Heel: Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Terrorism and Covert Attack* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998).

[20] Statistics compiled from data given in US Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, published annually by the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, US Department of State.

[21] *Ibid*.

[22] Based on State Department statistics, from a low in 1990–1993, there was a four-fold increase in number of casualties by the latter half of the 1990s. See also Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, p. 201: 'At least one person was killed in 29% of terrorist incidents in 1995: the highest ratio of fatalities to incident recorded in the chronology since 1968'.

[23] See, for example, Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin, 'America and the New Terrorism,' *Survival*, vol. 42, no. 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 59–75, and well as the responses in the subsequent issue, 'America and the New Terrorism: An Exchange,' *Survival*, vol. 42, no. 2 (Summer 2000), pp. 156–172; Bruce Hoffman, 'Terrorism Trends and Prospects', Chapter 2 in *Countering the New Terrorism* (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 1999), pp. 7–38.

[24] James Turner Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War: A Moral and Historical Inquiry* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).

[25] Robert Kennedy, 'Is One Person's Terrorist Another's Freedom Fighter? Western and Islamic Approaches to 'Just War' Compared', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 11, no. 1 (Spring 1999), pp. 1–21.

[26] For example, the Quran states: 'Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you' [002.190]; 'But if they cease, Allah is oft-forgiving, most merciful' [002.192]; 'And fight them on until there is not more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah; but if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression' [002.193]; 'Lost are those who slay their children.' [006.140]; 'Lo! Allah loveth not the treacherous' [008.058]. Translations are from *The Holy Qur'an: Roman Transliteration, with*

original Arabic Text and English translation, translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1999); and *The Holy Qur'an*, translated by M.H. Shakir (Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc., 1983). Web versions are available at http://www.umr.edu/~msaumr/Quran/ and http://www.hti.umich.edu/k/koran/.

[29] That is not to say that the United States has never dealt with a similar threat in the past: eminent observers have pointed out that the expedition of the US Marines in the nineteenth century against the Barbary pirates bears certain parallels. But the comparisons are imperfect, since, unlike the pirates, this threat taps into a fanatical international ideology and has greater potential to challenge core American interests. See Michael Howard, 'It's Not So Much War; It's More Like a Hunt', *The Times*, 2 October 2001; and Stephen Wrage, 'Pirates and Parasites', *The Washington Post*, 20 October 2001, p. A27.

[30] A recent sampling of articles blaming various people and oversights for the tragic attacks includes: Andrew Sullivan, 'The Fruits of Negligence: The Clinton Administration's Security Legacy', *The Sunday Times* (London), 30 September 2001; James Risen, 'In Hindsight, C.I.A. Sees Flaws that Hindered Efforts on Terror', *The New York Times*, 7 October 2001; Seymour M. Hersh, 'What Went Wrong: The C.I.A. and the failure of American intelligence', *The New Yorker*, 8 October 2001.

[31] In the Reagan administration, I was on the Defense Guidance staff, whose goal it was to create a long-range strategy to guide US force structure and deployment decisions. I have seen first hand the tendency of the American system to attempt to make 'strategy' by committee, and to settle on a lowest-common-denominator agreement that usually reflected the carefully protected interests of each player (e.g., the services, Congress, Office of the Secretary of Defence [OSD]). Despite the best intentions and the most erudite intellectual arguments, in the absence of an atmosphere of crisis, there is little likelihood of mustering the political capital necessary to make significant changes in American strategy stick. On the making of American strategy see Michael D. Pearlman, *Warmaking and American Democracy: The Struggle over Military Strategy, 1700 to the Present* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1999).

[32] A Gallup poll released on 18 October 2001 shows: 'About 3/4 of all Americans cite issues related to the 11 September attack as representing the most important problem facing the country today, including terrorism itself (46%), fear of war (10%), and national security (8%)'. Only the 'economy in general', at 13%, came close from other categories. From www.gallup.com, 'Terrorism Most Important Problem, But Americans Remain Upbeat'. Note: prior to 11 September, terrorism did not rate at all in these polls, or was rated at 1% or less.

[33] Numerous commentators have pointed out the parallels between Pearl Harbor and the 11 September attacks. See, for example, Adam Clymer, 'A Day of Terror: In the Capital; In the Day's Attacks and Explosions, Official Washington Hears the Eches of Earlier Ones', *New York Times*, 12 September 2001; David Von Drehle, 'World War, Cold War Won. Now the Gray War', *The Washington Post*, 12 September 2001; Robert Dagan, 'We Must Fight This War', *The Washington Post*, 12

September 2001.

[34] *Foreign Relations of the United States 1950*, Vol. I: National Security Affairs; Foreign Economic Policy, pp. 346ff. See Roy K. Flint, 'Task Force Smith and the 24th Division: Delay and Withdrawal, 5–19 July 1950', Chapter 9 of *America's First Battles, 1776–1965*, -Charles E. Heller and William A. Stofft (eds) (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1986), pp. 266–299. The best source for insight into how dearly American soldiers paid for US unpreparedness in Korea is T. R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War: The Class Korean War History* (London: Brassey's, 1998).
The lessons of Korea kept us from demobilising US military capabilities as we had after every other major conflict; but our ability to array them according to the most intellectually logical strategic planning continued to be distorted by the blessings and curses of a democratic state with an active legislative process. And we continued, at least until 1990, to have the Soviet threat against which to array them.
Commentators who have drawn comparisons with the Korean War include: Andrew J. Bacevich, *National Review*, 15 October 2001; Frederick W. Kagan, 'The Korean Parallel: Is it June 1950 all over again?', *The Weekly Standard*, 2 October 2001.

[35] For example, the Bremer Commission (2000), the Gillmore Commission (2000); and Hart-Rudman report, early 2001. L. Paul Bremer III and Maurice Sonnenberg (Chairman and Vice Chairman), 'Countering the Changing Threat of International Terrorism: Report of the National Commission on Terrorism', June 2000; James Gillmore (Chairman), 'Second Annual Report to the President and the Congress of the Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction', II, Toward a National Strategy for Combatting Terrorism, 15 December 2000; and The US Commission on National Security/21st Century, Phase I: 'New World Coming: American Security in the 21st Century', 15 September 1999, Phase II: 'Seeking a National Strategy: A Concert for Preserving Security and Promoting Freedom', 15 April 2000; and Phase III: 'Road Map for National Security: Imperative for Change', 15 February 2001.

[36] On this point, Paul Pillar's book is especially eloquent. For example, 'The permutations of ends and means relationships between counterterrorism and other foreign policy goals are innumerable. That is the point. Counterterrorism is part of a larger, complicated web of foreign policy endeavors and interests, with numerous trade-offs and unintended consequences that should not be ignored' (p. 29). Published before the 11 September attacks, the book remains an excellent source of balanced insights into American counter-terrorism policies. Paul R. Pillar, *Terrorism and US Foreign Policy* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).

[37] The decentralisation of US criminal and intelligence assets, while heartbreaking in retrospect because it may have led to earlier warning of the attacks and potentially apprehension of the hijackers, was a reflection of the relative lack of urgency and political complacency in the post-Cold War Environment. James Risen, 'In Hindsight, C.I.A. Sees Flaws That Hindered Efforts on Terror', *The New York Times*, 7 October 2001.

[38] Statistic derived from data presented in Office of Management and Budget, *Annual Report to Congress on*

Combating Terrorism, White House Publications Office, August 2001.

[39] See, for example, James Risen, 'In Hindsight, C.I.A. Sees Flaws That Hindered Efforts on Terror', *The New York Times*, 7 October 2001; Tim Weiner, 'To Fight in the Shadows, Get Better Eyes', *The New York Times*, 7 October 2001; and Seymour M. Hersh, 'What Went Wrong: the C.I.A. and the failure of American intelligence', *The New Yorker*, 8 October 2001.

[40] See for example, Larry C. Johnson, 'The Declining Terrorist Threat', *The New York Times*, 10 July 2001; and Ehud Sprinzak, 'The Great Superterrorism Scare', *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1998, pp. 110–124.

[41] Indeed, in US efforts to identify the next threat, its focus was on a rising People's Republic of China. It is important to remember that the terrorist threat was not the *only* major source of worry for US national planners.

[42] See, for example, Glenn Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961). Jessica Stern makes a similar argument regarding deterrence of terrorist acts in her book *The Ultimate Terrorists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), Chapter 8.

[43] See, for example, 'War Plan: Part 1; US Must Create Theaters of Operations', Strategic Forecasting LLC, 2001, at www.stratfor.com/home/0109242145.html; Michael R. Gordon, 'A Vigorous Debate on US War Tactics', *The New York Times*, 4 November 2001.

[44] Aaron Weiss, 'The Counterterrorism Spending Curve: Reaching Diminishing Returns', unpublished paper, Security Studies Program, Georgetown University, 6 December 2000. Although the main argument of this paper has now been overtaken by events, the methodology used to calculate the true costs of counter-terrorism spending in the United States is interesting and relevant.

[45] See Martha Crenshaw, 'Innovation: Decision Points in the Trajectory of Terrorism,' unpublished paper prepared for the Conference on Trajectories of Terrorist Violence in Europe,' March 9–11, 2001, Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[46] US Agency for International Development Fact Sheet, 'USAID Emergency Assistance to Afghanistan', 4 October 2001; at www.usaid.gov/press/releases/2001/01fs_afghanistan.html; and Bureau of South Asian Affairs, Fact Sheet, 'US Government Humanitarian Assistance to the Afghan People', US Department of State, 21 July 2000, at www.state.gov/www/regions/sa/fs_000721_usgsa.html.