

America and the New Terrorism

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The arrival of the new millennium was accompanied in the United States by fears of spectacular terrorist violence. Several agencies of the US government issued an unprecedented succession of warnings about possible attacks, and there were terrorism-related arrests in Canada, Jordan and the US.¹ The successful interdiction of these attackers and the passing of a date of unique significance will not, however, mean the end of this concern. It will continue, and even intensify, because the old paradigm of predominantly state-sponsored terrorism has been joined by a new, religiously motivated terrorism that neither relies on the support of sovereign states nor is constrained by the limits on violence that state sponsors have observed themselves or placed on their proxies.

The new terrorism has emerged during the Clinton presidency: the 1993 World Trade Center bombings in New York, and related conspiracies; the 1996 Oklahoma City bombing; the 1998 East Africa bombings; and the Tokyo sarin-gas attack in 1995. These attacks were the unmistakable harbingers of a new and vastly more threatening terrorism, one that aims to produce casualties on a massive scale. Although the new terrorism stems from a welter of causes, and cannot be considered the invention of any one individual, the face of this phenomenon belongs to Osama bin Laden, the exiled Saudi who has marshalled a network of operatives in more than 50 countries.

US analysts believe that religiously motivated terrorism will persist for many years, and that its Islamic manifestation will remain a threat regardless of bin Laden's fate. The resources which the US has devoted to combating the threat of terrorism reflect this view. In an era of predominantly straight-lined budgets, the US has doubled what it spends to fight terrorism since 1994, to more than \$10 billion for fiscal year 2000. Already, the US spends \$1.4bn each year on defensive measures against terrorist use of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) weapons, by training and equipping 'first

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responders' (police, fire, medical and other emergency-services personnel) in the country's 157 largest metropolitan areas. This programme, which includes deployable federal decontamination and treatment teams as well as stockpiles of medicines, is effectively a downpayment on the resurrection of a national civil-defence system. Other initiatives include the dramatic expansion of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's counter-terrorism division; more training programmes for law-enforcement and military personnel from outside the US; aggressive bilateral and multilateral diplomacy; increased security for federal buildings and military facilities; an intensive effort to develop and deploy high-technology equipment for aviation security; and an increased emphasis on counter-terrorism as a military mission. The tide of concern has not peaked: in its FY2001 budget submission, the Clinton administration has requested \$2bn for cyber-security, and the first instalment for an ambitious \$3bn multi-year programme to replace or harden vulnerable US diplomatic missions overseas.

The increase in resources has been complemented by legislative and bureaucratic innovation. In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, which authorised the creation of a special tribunal that can expedite the expulsion of foreigners from the US without disclosure of classified information to the deportee or his counsel. The law also made financial or material assistance to designated terrorist organisations a crime, raised various terrorism-related offences to the level of federal jurisdiction, and mandated the study of taggants that could help investigators in tracing the origin of explosives used in terrorist attacks. The administration pressed for this legislation despite sustained criticism from both the left and right about infringements of civil liberties.

Under the old paradigm, the US had grown accustomed to dealing with terrorism on an operational level as essentially a tactical rather than a strategic problem. The development, implementation and coordination of offensive and defensive programmes, as well as terrorism-related budget requests, were left largely to agencies that worked on an *ad hoc* basis, with minimal coordination and relatively limited White House supervision. The new paradigm has rendered such an approach obsolete. Between 1995 and 1998, the Clinton administration issued three ground-breaking Presidential Decision Directives on counter-terrorism, expanding and redefining departmental responsibilities while centralising White House control over operational activities. As part of this effort, the White House created the post of National Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism, Critical Infrastructure Protection and Security to oversee the expanding panoply of federal counter-terrorism programmes. Although this 'czar' lacks the independent authority over budgets and programmes enjoyed by the White House drug czar, his presence at the White House and access to the National Security Advisor gives him significant leverage over executive-branch agencies. Details of the new bureaucratic arrangements may change in coming years, but the programmes and increased funding levels now established are unlikely to be reduced, regardless of which party takes the White House in the November 2000 election.

An old, enduring danger

To understand how terrorism has moved to the front rank of threats for Washington, it is necessary to recall the dimensions of the problem at the beginning of the 1990s. When President Clinton took office in January 1993, the outstanding concerns about terrorism involved state sponsors, a term that derives from 1979 legislation that required special licences for exports to countries that the Secretary of State designated as supporters of terrorist groups. (A subsequent amendment requires the administration to list countries that do not cooperate with US efforts to combat terrorism.) As defined in succeeding legislation, designation depends not only on whether terrorism sponsored by a given country claims American lives, but also on the adverse impact the attacks have on US foreign-policy interests. Sudanese complicity in the 1995 assassination attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Ethiopia would thus, in principle, qualify the Khartoum regime for designation, just as attacks carried out by groups supported by Iraq or Syria that jeopardise the Middle East peace process could be a basis for designating those countries, even if there were no American casualties.

The states currently designated as sponsors of terrorism are Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Libya, North Korea and Cuba. All but Sudan, designated in 1993, were on the list when the Clinton administration took office. Some of these countries have not sponsored terrorist attacks in many years. North Korea and Cuba provide safe havens for terrorist groups – Japanese Red Army cadres still bide their time in North Korea, while Cuba shelters official representatives of the Colombian FARC and ELN – but neither country's fingerprints have appeared on any recent attacks. After years of UN sanctions and diplomatic isolation, Libya is slouching towards this category, now that it has surrendered the alleged bombers of Pan Am Flight 103 to a Scottish court sitting in the Netherlands. It also continues to provide safe haven for terrorists, including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) and other rejectionist Palestinian groups.

Syria is a special case, and is the only country that has any serious prospect of being removed from the list at any time soon. Damascus plays host to a full rogues' gallery of terrorist organisations, including several extremist Palestinian groups, and it facilitates *Hizbollah* operations by trans-shipping equipment and providing safe passage for personnel. Until 1998, Syria sheltered the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) which, the regime believed, gave it leverage against Turkey. That policy collapsed, however, when the Turks deployed 30,000 troops to their border with Syria, publicised their growing military relationship with Israel and demanded the expulsion of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan from Damascus. Syrian President Hafez al-Asad capitulated in October 1998 and expelled Ocalan, whose flight ended the following February when he was apprehended by Turkish authorities in Nairobi. Syria will presumably seek to maintain corresponding leverage against Israel, particularly through its support for *Hizbollah* in Lebanon, until the peace negotiations have progressed further, or possibly until they are concluded.

Syria's removal from the terrorism list will no doubt be an element of whatever arrangement the US, Israel and Syria devise to shut down the arms and equipment pipeline to Lebanese *Hizbollah* and neutralise Palestinian rejectionist groups, especially the Palestine Islamic *Jihad* (PIJ), that operate out of Damascus.

For others in the group of state sponsors, removal from the list in the near future is not easy to envision. The legislation is vague on criteria for removal, leaving the executive branch with broad discretion. In the case of Libya, the administration has said that Tripoli must take appropriate rhetorical steps, likely to entail an admission that the Gadaffi regime had supported terrorism in the past. Such a requirement can be unpalatable to a regime like Gadaffi's, which seeks to maintain or restore some measure of international credibility and domestic legitimacy. Given the flexibility of the sanctions law, however, Washington may find ways to finesse the issue, if the incentive is there. Iraq, which had been on the list in the early 1980s, was rehabilitated by the Reagan administration so that statutory obstacles to assistance during the Iran–Iraq war might be removed.

Iraq was put back on the list by the Bush administration and, together with Iran and Sudan, comprises the separate category of hardened offenders. In the US view, these countries pose a serious, continuing terrorist threat to American interests. Sudan provides safe haven to *Hizbollah*, PIJ and *Hamas*. Sudan also produces chemical weapons for use by terrorists, an activity viewed by the US as so dangerous that in August 1998 it destroyed the al-Shifa chemical plant in Khartoum. Iraq shelters the Palestinian Abu Nidal organisation, and maintains a terrorist capability within its own security services, which Saddam Hussein would not hesitate to use against the US if it served his tactical interests and had the necessary reach and competence. Saddam's inclinations have been clear at least since his attempt to have former President Bush assassinated during a visit to Kuwait in 1993. That conspiracy prompted the Clinton administration's first military strike, a cruise-missile attack against Iraqi intelligence headquarters in Baghdad.

Iranian targeting of US interests remains an issue of critical concern to Washington policy-makers. Attorney General Janet Reno stated in late 1999 that the United States had information indicating the involvement of Iranian officials in the 1996 bombing of the US Air Force Khobar Towers residence in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, which killed 19 and wounded many more.² The Attorney General's statement made clear that the Khobar investigation would continue, with a judgement forthcoming on whether the Iranian leadership was directly involved.

Iran's surveillance of overseas US installations and personnel gives Tehran the option of striking simultaneously at multiple US targets in a way that its military could not.³ Iran's 1997 attempt to smuggle a 'super mortar' into Europe via the port of Antwerp appears to be of a piece with these tactics:⁴ such a weapon would be ideal for an accurate, devastating stand-off attack against a defended location, such as an embassy. The same kind of mortar was used by

Iran in 1996 to demolish the headquarters building of the dissident *Mujahedin e-Khalq* (MEK) in Baghdad. Further evidence of Iran's activity was provided during 1996 when an IFOR unit raided an Iranian terrorism and sabotage training facility in the Bosnian town of Fojnica. Established by official representatives of Iran, the facility stored booby traps, explosives and assassination manuals.⁵ The Fojnica discovery led NATO to demand that President Alija Izetbegovic sharply reduce the official Iranian presence in Bosnia.

Iranian-sponsored violence in Europe has not only been directed at US and NATO interests. The September 1992 killing of three dissidents and a translator in the Mykonos restaurant in Berlin led a German court to issue an arrest warrant for Ali Fallahian, former head of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS).⁶ The prosecutors charged Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and then President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani with approving the operation. Another dissident, Reza Maslouman, was murdered in Paris in 1996 by an attacker allegedly linked to the MOIS, who has since been extradited to Germany for trial. French investigators have also implicated Iranian operatives in the 1991 murder of Shahpour Bakhtiar, a former official and dissident, in Paris.⁷

After its operations against Iranian opponents of the Tehran government, Iran's highest-priority target for terrorist activity is Israel. Its immediate objective is the derailment of the Middle East peace process. On 31 December 1999, Khamenei reaffirmed his call for the 'annihilation and destruction of the Zionist state' and branded Syrian negotiations with Israel as 'treason'.⁸ These statements were not idle expressions of hostility. Rather, they reflect the established Iranian policy of using terrorism to undermine the peace process by destabilising Israel's political process and discrediting Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

To achieve these goals, Tehran trains, finances and equips *Hamas*, *Hizbollah* and the PIJ, among others. Iran's strategy for weakening Arafat centres on exacerbating the existing rivalry between *Hamas* and the Palestinian Authority. By adding to the pressure on Arafat to confront and suppress *Hamas*, Tehran aims to stoke resentment of Arafat among Palestinians and reinforce perceptions of him as a lackey of the Israeli authorities.

In its impact on Israeli politics, Iran's support for terrorism has demonstrated its efficacy. In a civil suit in a US court, Iran was found responsible for causing the death of American citizen Alisa Flatow, who was killed in a 1995 attack on a bus in Tel Aviv, for which the PIJ claimed responsibility. On the basis of evidence regarding Iran's budget for terrorism and its links to the PIJ provided by an academic expert, and current and former US officials, the court concluded that Iran had financed the attack and was therefore culpable.⁹ This attack and others in that period weakened public support for Prime Minister Shimon Peres and led to Binyamin Netanyahu's 1996 election victory, and a four-year stalemate in the peace process.

In the aftermath of the 1995 attacks, the US provided Israel with \$100 million over two years to boost its counter-terrorism capabilities and to provide

technical means to monitor the movement of terrorists and weapons across the Green Line, dividing pre-1967 Israel from Gaza and the West Bank. This assistance was designed to reduce Israeli reliance on lengthy closures of the occupied territories that damaged the Palestinian economy and undercut Arafat's authority. Although counter-terrorism cooperation between Israel and the Palestinians has achieved considerable success, Israeli and US policy-makers have warned that Iranian-backed terrorists may strike again as the Palestinian and Syrian tracks approach critical junctures.

Iran's persistent support for terror has been frustrating for a US administration keenly interested in *rapprochement* and eager to move beyond the policy of dual containment of Iran and Iraq. So long as Saddam Hussein rules in Baghdad, Washington can conceive of no alternative to containing Iraq. In this case, despite periodic Russian, Chinese and French objections, the US faces no compelling pressure to revise its policy. UN Security Council sanctions against Iraq remain in place. US and UK aircraft continue to stage Southern and Northern Watch missions from carriers and bases on the Arabian peninsula and in Turkey. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) governments continue to line up publicly behind the policy towards Iraq, as their November 1999 summit indicated. The US and UK managed to win UN Security Council backing for a follow-on to the Special Commission on Disarmament (UNSCOM) and restructuring of the 'oil for food' programme without French, Russian and Chinese support, while Saddam has failed to formulate an effective counter to his adversaries' strategy.

Containment of Iran, on the other hand, faces strong challenges. Elf Aquitaine and Royal Dutch Shell, backed by their respective governments (France and Britain/Netherlands), are investing heavily in Iranian oil exploration and production in defiance of the threat of extra-territorial sanctions under the US Iran-Libya Sanctions Act. Diplomatic receptivity towards Iran by America's European allies, coupled with their refusal to make a sustained effort to isolate Iran in the aftermath of the Mykonos verdict and subsequent disclosure of continued Iranian terrorist planning, have undermined containment. Confronted with this lack of solidarity, and weary of the burdens of containment, the administration saw the election of Mohammad Khatami as president – an advocate of democratic and market reforms as well as closer ties with the West – as a moment of opportunity. Since Khatami's arrival in office, the President and the Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, have both spoken favourably about Iranian democracy, expressed understanding for Iranian resentment of the US, softened trade and economic sanctions, and even floated the notion of reopening a US consulate in Tehran.¹⁰ Khatami's reaction to these overtures has consistently been lukewarm, however, and he has gone no further than to endorse people-to-people exchanges with the US, dismissing official contact as premature.¹¹ In the wake of the revelations in late 1999 concerning Iranian officials' complicity in the Khobar bombing, however, this warming appears to be finished.¹²

Attorney-General Janet Reno's statement left a door open for Iran to assist in the investigation and thereby improve bilateral relations. But the leadership's

cold response to a White House letter requesting cooperation makes clear that Tehran has no interest in admitting involvement of any kind. For the US, the question of official Iranian backing for the bombing will remain an immovable obstacle to *rapprochement*. President Khatami, despite a record of statements opposing terrorism, appears incapable or unwilling to help resolve the issue, perhaps by offering to assist in the investigation which would require him to overcome the divisions within the regime between his reformist camp and the hardliners grouped loosely around Ali Khamenei. Khatami has elected not to distance himself from the issue by noting, as the US administration has done, that the attack took place before his election. Perhaps the best explanations for Khatami's silence are that the Iranian regime places a high priority on maintaining a united front in its confrontation with the US, which makes it impossible for him to break ranks, and that the near-certain conservative backlash would jeopardise his administration. His position may also reflect his lack of meaningful control over the MOIS and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the agencies that plan and execute terrorist attacks, and therefore his limited ability to affect this Iranian policy.

Lessons of the state sponsors

US experience with Iran underscores a number of key aspects of the phenomenon of state-sponsored terrorism. Acts of terror are designed and carried out by official intelligence agencies (MOIS or IRGC) and their 'subcontractors', such as *Hizbollah*. Violence, for the most part, is carefully targeted and proportionate in scope and intensity to the practical political objectives being pursued. Iran's support for terrorism, for example, has been closely linked to its domestic and foreign-policy objectives. Thus, attacks against Israeli civilians in Tel Aviv are intended to discredit Israeli leaders who advocate peace. Attacks against Israel's northern settlements and Defence Force units in Lebanon advance Iran's objective of loosening Israel's hold on southern Lebanon and reducing Israeli security. Similarly, Iran's apparent involvement in the Khobar attack would be in line with its strategic objective of weakening the US position in the Gulf. In this context, the attack makes sense as a way to demonstrate to America's Gulf allies US vulnerability, to drive a wedge between the US and Saudi Arabia, and show the US public the heavy costs of a military presence in the Gulf. The Khobar attack was certainly proportional to this objective. Moreover, the blow met the cardinal requirement of such attacks: by carefully covering its tracks, Iran inflicted serious harm without eliciting an intolerable military reaction.

The dimensions of the violence involved in state-sponsored terror have thus been similar to what has been seen in many conflicts between ethnic, nationalist or social-revolutionary groups and national governments. To be sure, old-paradigm terrorists occasionally disregarded the principle of constrained violence, especially when their movements escalated into insurgencies or full-blown civil war. But in cases in which that did not happen, such as Northern Ireland or the Palestinian struggle, most groups employing terrorism have calculated that indiscriminate violence would alienate compatriots they wanted

to attract. Excessive violence directed at civilians would only undercut their claims of legitimacy among the broader public. The prudent course, therefore, was to use selective attacks to discredit the targeted political authorities, expose the impotence and, on occasion, the brutality of their law-enforcement and military subordinates, and draw international attention to the cause. By avoiding egregious bloodshed, group leaders preserved their eligibility for a place at the bargaining table and, ultimately, a role in successor governments. Both the PLO and IRA have shown the efficacy of this policy. In the much-quoted formulation of terrorism expert Brian Jenkins, these terrorists wanted a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead. State sponsors have typically wanted their acts of terror to achieve a similar effect.

Religion and lethality

Terrorism has become a first-order priority for the Clinton administration because the phenomenon of state sponsorship has been joined by a new, more dangerous brand. Four developments mark the advent of this new form of terror:

- the emergence of religion as the predominant impetus for terrorist attacks;
- the increasing lethality of attacks;
- the increasing technological and operational competence of terrorists; and
- the demonstrated desire of these terrorists to obtain weapons of mass destruction.

RAND terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman has shown that the proportion of terrorist groups motivated predominantly by religious concerns has increased sharply. More importantly, he has demonstrated that the increase in religious motivation correlates with an increase in lethality. For 1995, Hoffman's data show that religiously motivated terrorists were responsible for a quarter of all incidents in that year, but caused nearly 60% of all fatalities. Moreover, in 1996, the last year for which he has data, 'Groups driven in whole or in part by a salient religious or theological motive committed 10 of the 13 most lethal terrorists attacks'.¹³ These groups put 'political issues and struggles within a sacred context', thus giving them the most charged ontological significance.¹⁴ The solution they seek amounts to the restoration of a golden age of religious belief and practices, whose passing left the community vulnerable to the depredations of the enemy. The essentially religious goal of moral restoration becomes the basis of a political response in the form of a confrontation with the enemy within and without. In this framework, the warriors believe themselves to be engaged in a struggle ordained by God, to restore the world to a perfect state. The violent acts they must carry out are 'sanitised' because they are symbolic, enacted on a cosmic stage.¹⁵ Given these stakes, the intensity of the violence cannot be confined by prudential calculations.

Although *jihadists* comprise the most immediate threat posed by such believers to US security, the threat of intensified violence posed by terrorists

motivated by other radical religious traditions is a serious concern. The Christian Patriot movement in the US, Jewish messianic militants and Japan's *Aum Shinrikyo* all share a Manichean world-view characterised by this sense of life-or-death struggle with the 'other' in order to redeem the world. Timothy McVeigh, who bombed the federal building in Oklahoma City killing 168 people, has been linked to the Christian Patriot movement, which is engaged in a struggle to free the US from the grip of Jews and Freemasons and restore it to a religiously and racially pristine state. For Yigal Amir, who assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, the perfect world existed in the second century bc, when Jews controlled both sides of the Jordan under the Hasmonean state, which itself had overthrown an infidel occupier and its Jewish collaborators to take power. *Aum Shinrikyo* intended to precipitate an eschatological battle which would destroy a corrupted world but leave the group's members intact.

In the case of the *jihadists*, the restored world would recreate the early seventh–eighth century Caliphate when, in their understanding of Islamic history, a righteous leader ruled over an undivided *umma* (community of believers), achieving a perfect unity of religious and political authority over the lands of Islam. In the modern recreation of this ideal, non-believers would be subdued or destroyed, the Koran would form the sole legitimate basis for governance and community life, and Muslim leaders who did not strive to restore the sovereignty of God to his lands would be judged apostates, and condemned.

These were the beliefs of the conspirators in the World Trade Center bombing, the plot to blow up the Lincoln Tunnel and other New York landmarks, the 1995 plot to destroy 11 US aircraft over the Pacific and, of course, the August 1998 attack against the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. If these operations had all been fully successful, they would have caused casualties in the tens of thousands. The cleric connected to many of the conspirators in these cases, Sheikh Umar abd ar-Rahman, has provided the inspiration for these acts of radical, religiously motivated violence.¹⁶ The so-called 'Blind Sheikh', abd ar-Rahman had emigrated to the US from Egypt. It was he who articulated the justification of apostasy for the 1981 murder of President Anwar al-Sadat and attempted murder of President Mubarak in 1995. He also led *al Gama'a al Islamiyya*, an extremely violent group responsible for the massacre of 72 people, mostly Western tourists, at Luxor in Upper Egypt in 1998. In a planning session for bombing targets in New York City, he put the imperative of *jihad* to his co-conspirators as follows:

They were to do jihad with the sword, with the cannon, with the grenades, with the missile ... against God's enemies ... to break and destroy the morale of the enemies of Allah ... [destroying] the structure of their civilized pillars. Such as the touristic infrastructure which they are proud of and their high world buildings which they are proud of and their statues which they endear and the buildings in which they gather their leaders. God the Almighty ... will facilitate for the believers to penetrate the lines no matter how strong they are.¹⁷

For ar-Rahman, the fight was not limited to his embattled homeland of Egypt; rather the 'fields of *jihad*' encompassed all lands where he believed Muslims were under the domination of non-believers: 'Bosnia, Palestine, the Philippines, Somalia, southern Sudan, and ... Afghanistan'.¹⁸ Since this was a sacred struggle, *fatwas* were required to legitimise and ritualise the violent acts which the combatants would carry out. Thus, ar-Rahman's followers at his Brooklyn mosque believed that his religious imprimatur was necessary whenever one did something 'basically unlawful', which would be wrong unless the 'mission [was] under the flag of God and his messenger'.¹⁹ Indeed, in the realm of religious warfare, *fatwas* declaring the necessity of bloodshed have come to replace *ex post facto* claims of responsibility.

Osama bin Laden's February 1998 *fatwa* strongly conveys the sense of total war against an irreconcilable opponent:

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty God, 'and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together', and 'fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God' ... We – with God's help – call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God's order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. We also call on Muslim ulema, leaders, youths, and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan's US troops and the devil's supporters allying with them, and to displace those who are behind them so that they may learn a lesson.²⁰

Those who hesitate to carry out the demands of the *fatwa* are deemed apostates and will themselves be punished: 'Unless ye go forth, [God] will punish you with a grievous penalty, and put others in your place; but Him ye would not harm in the least. For God hath power over all things'.²¹

Bin Laden's interview with CNN correspondent Peter Arnett also conveys the unlimited objectives of a religiously motivated campaign:

We have declared jihad against the US, because in our religion it is our duty to make jihad so that God's word is the one exalted to the heights and so that we drive the Americans away from all Muslim countries ... the driving-away jihad against the US does not stop with its withdrawal from the Arabian peninsula, but rather it must desist from aggressive intervention against Muslims in the whole world.²²

Bin Laden's theological politics entails warfare without end. Referring to the new generation of *jihad* volunteers in Afghanistan (not the generation that fought against the Soviets assisted by the US), he says that:

their number, by the grace of God, was quite big, Praise and Gratitude be to Him, and they spread in every place in which non-believers' injustice is perpetuated against Muslims. Their going to Bosnia, Chechnya, Tajikistan and other countries is

but a fulfilment of a duty, because we believe that these states are part of the Islamic World. Therefore, any act of aggression against any of this land of a span of hand measure makes it a duty for Muslims to send a sufficient number of their sons to fight off that aggression.²³

Within this conceptual framework, *jihadists* believe that the corruption of the enemy and its alienation from God render it weak and susceptible to ultimate defeat. Bin Laden reflected this view when he told Arnett that their prior victory against another infidel power, the Soviet Union, would be replicated more speedily against the US, a lesser adversary:

[The United States] left [Somalia] after claiming that they were the largest power on earth. They left after some resistance from powerless, poor, unarmed people whose only weapon is the belief in Allah The Almighty. We learned from those who fought there, that they were surprised to see the low spiritual morale of the American fighters in comparison with the experience they had with the Russian fighters. The Americans ran away from those fighters who fought and killed them, while the latter were still there. If the US still thinks and brags that it still has this kind of power even after all these successive defeats in Vietnam, Beirut, Aden [here bin Laden confuses the US with the UK], and Somalia, then let them go back to those who are awaiting its return.²⁴

Under this essentially religious banner, bin Laden has united a diverse range of groups that had not previously cooperated: Egyptian Islamic *Jihad*, *al Gama'a al Islamiyya*, *Jamiat ul-Islami*, *Harakat ul-Mujahedin*, *mujaheddin* in Chechnya and Daghestan, *Ittihad al-Islami* in Somalia, *Abu Sayyaf* in the Philippines and, as now seems to be the case, elements associated with the Algerian *Groupes Islamiques Armées* (GIA), who have infiltrated the US with plans to attack it.²⁵ The appearance of individuals with GIA affiliation in an apparent plot against the US is a measure of bin Laden's achievement. The GIA has never before targeted the US, but some of its members, having worked in Afghanistan with bin Laden's *al-Qa'ida* ('the base') organisation, have suddenly abandoned their traditional targets and turned their attention to the US.

Skills, organisation and reach

Among the different groups of religious terrorists, the *jihad* camp has an organisational structure, combat experience, technical skills, training and capacity for mobility that give it strong operational advantages. In organisational terms, one might call these 'non-group groups'. There is little hierarchy. Operatives are known to each other personally, having met, as in the case of the so-called Afghan Arabs (responsible for the World Trade Center bombing and plot to destroy aircraft over the Pacific), in training camps in Afghanistan. These camps were established to train volunteers in the war against the Soviets, but remained in operation after the Soviet withdrawal, and have been built up and enlarged by bin Laden. The Ramzi Yousef group appears to have coalesced almost accidentally, some members becoming acquainted in a Brooklyn mosque, others having ties from Afghanistan.

Members of bin Laden's *al-Qa'ida* operate self-sufficiently to a degree, although it is known that they communicate with the leadership in Afghanistan and with each other, combining elements of a 'hub and spoke' structure (where nodes communicate with the centre) with a 'wheel' structure (where nodes in the network communicate with each other without reference to the centre). This is a structure that combines resilience with command and control, complicating efforts to root out cells and disrupt operations. The looseness of these networks, and the way in which the cells within them coalesce, make identification, penetration and disruption of the groups extremely difficult, particularly for Western intelligence agencies with expertise in recruiting foreign government officials as sources.

These terrorists are adept at exploiting the tremendous expansion of intercontinental air-carrier links and the weak customs and immigration controls of many countries in which they operate or through which they transit. This ability helps them to pursue their goals in 'fields of *jihad*' around the world and accounts for the apparent ubiquity of cells. In view of the informal recruitment system that cannot rely on systematic standards in selection of new members, and a training system that outside Afghanistan is haphazard at best, the operatives' tradecraft and technical skills are good. Many volunteers come with technical training, typically in computer science or engineering. They are adept at establishing plausible cover for their activities, usually in the form of legitimate businesses, occasionally with import-export interests. Such cover allows operatives to evade suspicion while using international phone, fax and e-mail communications that facilitate the movement of operatives, travel documents, funds, equipment and weapons. The terrorists have also shown skill at maintaining operational security, practising an impressive degree of compartmentalisation and, in the case of Ramzi Yousef, using commercial encryption to conceal communications.

Both the Ramzi Yousef group and the *al-Qa'ida* operatives responsible for the East Africa embassy attacks displayed high levels of skill in all of these areas. The attack against the World Trade Center was well planned and, with a somewhat larger bomb, could have achieved its goal: toppling one World Trade tower into the other, killing as many as 20,000 people. The Yousef group's plan to destroy 11 US civilian passenger aircraft over the Pacific used a crude kind of computerised systems-analysis to determine where bombs had to be placed on specific flight segments, where attackers had to disembark to avoid suicide, and how the fuses were to be set to yield the desired number of simultaneous detonations. The terrorists carried out an experimental run in late 1994 to test a small charge of their own design, which killed a Japanese man on a Philippines Airlines flight via Cebu to Tokyo. Had it not been for an accidental fire in early 1995 at the Manila bomb factory that revealed the attack preparations to Philippine authorities, the plan might well have succeeded.²⁶

Technical and organisational advantages are enhanced by access to funding: *al-Qa'ida* relies only in part on bin Laden's personal fortune, estimated at over \$200m, and the revenue from his investments. Affiliated groups, as well as *al-*

Qa'ida infrastructure in Afghanistan, are sustained by proceeds from the *zakat* (mosque contributions) in many locations, large amounts of money diverted from established welfare organisations or funds collected specifically for the terrorists. Wealthy, like-minded donors in the Persian Gulf also contribute large sums. These groups are awash with money.²⁷

Weapons of mass destruction

Spectacular goals require spectacular means. The new breed of religiously motivated terrorists has repeatedly sought to achieve destruction on the grand scale. The Oklahoma City bombing was the largest in American history (although if the World Trade Center bombers had accomplished their goal, it would have been small by comparison). The almost simultaneous bombing of two US embassies in East Africa created not only thousands of casualties but also the clear impression that overwhelming carnage was intended, both for its own sake and in order to demoralise Americans. Against this backdrop, the complementarity between the maximal objectives of the new terrorists and WMD emerges clearly. These groups, unlike their secular counterparts, want a lot of people watching *and* a lot of people dead. An attack using chemical, biological or even nuclear weapons would therefore seem to be a natural next step for them. Moreover, publicity about terrorism involving WMD probably generates pressure within terrorist groups to use these weapons.

Sceptics about this proposition contend, rightly, that conventional explosives are well understood and relatively easy to fabricate, with blast effect limited only by the size of available containers and a demonstrated capacity to cause massive casualties. WMD, by contrast, are difficult to obtain, handle safely and store. Whether the aim is to culture and weaponise biological agents, deliver chemical weapons in an unpredictable environment or procure or fabricate a nuclear weapon, the challenges are daunting. Nonetheless, recent events indicate that extremist religious groups have sought WMD and, US officials believe, will continue to do so. Indeed, those who argue on grounds of efficacy that terrorists will not devote the resources and energies necessary for WMD procurement may be missing the point. These terrorists seek to maximise the number of casualties, but the additional horror that attaches to WMD use would provide a premium on their investment. Thus, after multiple failures in its effort to use biological weapons, *Aum Shinrikyo* still refused to use conventional weapons, switching instead to chemical weapons for its attack in the Tokyo subway. After a multi-million dollar production effort, supervised by a Ph.D. chemist, the attack claimed 12 lives, undoubtedly far fewer than the cult was seeking. But for *Aum's* apocalyptic aims, more reliable, conventional weapons would not have been fitting.

Aum Shinrikyo failed to precipitate the Armageddon that its literature had forecast, but it did shatter a crucial psychological barrier. While the cult may lie at the far end of the spectrum in its determination to hasten a historic cataclysm, other groups appear to be pursuing the acquisition of WMD. The US attack against the al-Shifa pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum underscored the

American assessment that *al-Qa'ida* was trying to obtain chemical weapons. The Clinton administration concluded – on the basis of forensic evidence of a precursor of the nerve agent VX in the vicinity of the plant, intelligence indicating an active Sudanese chemical-weapons production programme, and financial contributions to the effort by bin Laden – that an effort to obtain a WMD capability was under way. This linkage has been the source of controversy, primarily because of the inferential nature of some of the conclusions reached in the threat-assessment process that informed the decision to use force. These analytical inferences, however, were based on a cautious reading of the evidence.

Sudan is one of six state sponsors of terrorism with WMD-production programmes. (The others are Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea and Syria.) Any one of these could, if it wished, transfer material to a terrorist group with which its interests converged. The desire to elude discovery and avoid retaliation would make this an attractive option for a state intent upon attacking the US or its allies. One little-noted effect of the US strike against the plant was to convey a clear warning to other rogue states that might be tempted to transfer material to terrorist groups.

Acquiring WMD or materials need not depend on the collaboration of a state sponsor. Terrorists appear increasingly eager to purchase weapons or components, possibly from the pilfered stocks of the former Soviet Union or from the broad array of dual-use materials and equipment found on the open market. A bin Laden lieutenant, Mamdouh Mahmoud Salim, was extradited to the US from Germany early in 1999 and charged with ‘conspiring to use WMD’.²⁸ He is believed to have been bin Laden’s chief procurement officer, responsible for obtaining such weapons. *Al-Qa'ida* is also believed to be seeking operatives with the technological and engineering abilities necessary for WMD use, and to be recruiting more activists with the necessary expertise. Most importantly, though, the close affinity between these weapons’ destructiveness and the beliefs of *al-Qa'ida* and other groups like it will impel terrorists to overcome technical, organisational and logistical obstacles to WMD use.

Outlook for US policy

Since 1995, when the first of the Clinton administration’s three Presidential-Decision Directives on counter-terrorism was issued, US officials have drawn a number of conclusions about the new threat environment and how to navigate within it. The American view of this new paradigm threat can be summarised as follows:

- America’s military might and unique status as a superpower will drive adversaries towards asymmetric strategies, including terrorism.
- The US may not be able to deter such adversaries, given the religious passion driving their violent behaviour.
- The advent of WMD and the irrelevance of deterrence could elevate terrorism from the level of a tactical nuisance to that of a strategic challenge. The budgetary and programmatic response must, therefore, be proportional.

- Given the nature of WMD and cyber-terrorism, attacks could come from anywhere. Responsibility may be difficult if not impossible to ascertain.
- There will probably be attacks attempted on US soil.
- The rise of non-state actors represents a challenge to traditional US intelligence resources and methods. In particular, the difficulty of infiltrating these groups must be offset by attacking their logistical support.
- Given these conditions, the US should increase its efforts to address its vulnerabilities since emerging threats may be of a nature and provenance that cannot be anticipated, pre-empted or prevented. Renovation of a national civil-defence programme and the protection of critical infrastructure is therefore necessary.
- The US government itself must improve the coordination of programmes and budgets in the areas of law enforcement, intelligence, diplomacy and military capability.
- The US cannot counter this threat by itself. The cooperation of other countries is essential.

Conclusion

In this new environment and with so much at stake, the United States will be extremely risk averse. The conclusions that policy-makers have drawn provide a road map for the near term, and the decisive programmatic and budgetary actions they have taken will enhance American defences against terrorism. There is also a nascent recognition in the international community that the threat of religious terrorism, particularly the *jihadist* type, poses a danger not only to the United States but also to a broad range of status quo powers. The unanimous support in the UN Security Council for economic sanctions on the *Taliban* for sheltering Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan demonstrated this sentiment, and there has been an increase in diplomatic and intelligence cooperation in confronting this threat among countries that previously found little ground for making common cause.

Nonetheless, Washington recognises that it is impossible to foil all attacks. The emerging logic of 'maximal terrorism' suggests that, even if only one plot succeeds, the perpetrators will have created the impression that they are 'winning' and their success will sharply erode the public's sense of security. This perception would embolden other attackers, triggering more costly defensive measures, possibly including legislation that affects civil liberties.

Longer-term trends offer little hope that this new brand of terrorism will quickly disappear. Dramatic setbacks for these extremist groups, such as mass arrests or other more violent forms of repression, tend to confirm their core beliefs and strengthen their determination. Evidence suggests that some of these extremist movements continue to attract recruits, and their beliefs resonate strongly in many communities. The reasons are complex and reflect the profound changes overtaking many societies: the rapid, often dislocating advance of technology; economic and social upheaval; crises of legitimacy; and insurmountable barriers to political expression. A great deal of work remains to be done in order to identify the conditions that cause alienation to explode in

violence and, in particular, to trace the links between religion and extreme forms of violence. Eliminating the deeper causes of the new terror, however, is almost certainly beyond the ability of any single government or even of many of them acting in concert. The United States and other countries perceived by extremists to be the source of profound threat will therefore be forced to play defence against religious terrorism for some time to come. They will have to hope that broader historical developments will begin to ameliorate, rather than inflame, the grievances behind the new terrorism.

Notes

¹ David Stout, 'State Department Intensifies Warning on Terrorism', *New York Times*, 22 December 1999; 'Jordan Seizes 13 and Links Them to Afghan Explosives Training', *ibid.*, 16 December 1999; John F. Burns and Craig Pyes, 'Radical Islamic Network May Have Come to the US', *ibid.*, 31 December 1999; Stephen Kinzer, 'Jordan Links Terrorist Plot to bin Laden', *ibid.*, 4 February 2000; David Johnston, Judith Miller and William K. Rathbaum, 'Evidence Is Seen Linking bin Ladin to Algerian Group', *ibid.*, 27 January 2000; Craig Pyes, 'Canada Adds Details on Algerian Suspected Bomb Plot', *ibid.*, 21 January 2000.

² 'New Evidence Ties Iran to Terrorism', *Newsweek International*, 15 November 1999, available at <http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/nw-srv/printed/int/dept/ps/a29747-1999nov8.htm>.

³ 'Intelligence Agency Highlights Threat of Anti-American Terror in Tajikistan', *Washington Times*, 9 December 1997; 'Iran Reportedly Spied on US Personnel in Saudi Arabia', *Los Angeles Times*, 15 October 1997, p. 6. Iranian surveillance in these disparate locations presumably represents a broad pattern of pre-operational activity.

⁴ Marlise Simons, 'Mortar Found in Iranian Ship in Pickles Bound for Germany', *New York Times*, 1 May 1996, p. A8.

⁵ 'NATO Raids "Terrorist" Camp in Bosnia', CNN, 16 February 1996, available at <http://cnn.com/WORLD/bosnia/updates/9602/16/index.html>.

⁶ 'German Court Rules Iranian Leaders Ordered Berlin Slayings', CNN, 10 April 1997, available at <http://cnn.com/WORLD/9704/10/germany.iran.pm/index.html>.

⁷ 'The Tehran Connection: An Exclusive Look at How Iran Hunts Down Its Opponents Abroad', *Time*, 21 March 1994, available at <http://www.pathfinder.com/time/magazine/archive/1994/940321/940321.terrorism.html>.

⁸ 'Iran Leader Urges "Annihilation of Israel"', FBIS-NES-1999-1231, 31 December 1999.

⁹ 'Steven Flatow v. The Islamic Republic of Iran *et al.*, Order and Judgment', US District Court for the District of Columbia, CA. No. 97-396 (RCL), filed 4 March 1998.

¹⁰ Jane Perlez and James Risen, 'Clinton Seeks an Opening to Iran, But Efforts Have Been Rebuffed', *New York Times*, 3 December 1999.

¹¹ 'Iranian, in Paris Speech, Aims Barb at US', *ibid.*, 29 October 1999, p. A8.

¹² Jane Perlez, 'US to Deport Saudi Suspect in a 1996 Terror Bombing', *ibid.*, 5 October 1999, p. A10.

¹³ Bruce Hoffman, 'Holy Terror: The Implications of Terrorism Motivated by

a Religious Imperative', RAND Review, p. 4, available at <http://www.rand.org/cgi-bin/Abstracts/e-getabbydoc.p1?p-7834>.

¹⁴ Mark Juergensmyer, 'The Worldwide Rise of Religious Nationalism', *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 50, no. 1, Summer 1996, p. 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁶ Richard Bernstein, 'US Portrays Sheikh as Head of Wide Terrorist Network', *New York Times*, 6 May 1994, p. A1.

¹⁷ 'United States of America Appellee v. Omar Ahmed Ali Abdel Rahman *et al.* Defendants-Appellants', US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, pp. 5–6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁰ The English text of bin Laden's *fatwa*, originally published in Arabic in *al Quds al Arabi*, is available at <http://lib1.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/bladen98.htm>.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Peter Arnett, 'Interview with Osama bin Ladin', CNN, 11 May 1997, available at <http://cnn.com/CNN/Programs/>

[impact/9705/09/feature/transcript.ladin.html](http://www.cnn.com/1997/05/11/feature/transcript.ladin.html).

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ See note 1 above.

²⁶ 'Foreign Terrorists in America: Five Years after the World Trade Center', Statement of Dale Watson, Chief International Terrorism Section, National Security Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Technology, Terrorism, and Government Information, US Senate, 24 February 1998, available at http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/1998_hr/s980224w.htm.

²⁷ Jack Kelley, 'Saudi Money Aiding Terrorist bin Laden', *USA Today*, 28 October 1999, available at <http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/nwsth01.htm>.

²⁸ 'A Network of Terrorists? Embassy Bomb Suspects with Links to bin Laden in Custody', ABC News, available at http://abcnews.go.com/sections/world/DailyNews/terrorists_990110.html.