

A NEW STRATEGY FOR AMERICA'S WAR ON TERRORISM

America's current thinking on how to defeat radical Islamists is split along two very different schools of thought. Republicans, following what is known as the Bush Doctrine, advocate the military model of taking the fight to the enemy and seeking to democratize the Middle East. Democrats, by contrast, propose the law enforcement model of better cooperation with nations and more security at home. Although we have implemented aspects of both policies, the way forward is anything but clear. For one thing, our fight against terrorism is complicated by the fact that we are not fighting standing armies. Estimates are, about 15 percent of the world's Muslims either support or have mixed feelings of terrorism against us.¹ This amounts to some 250 million people, scattered across dozens of ethnic groups and nations, including many countries friendly to the United States. This small but dangerous minority is united by a fanatical hatred of the West.

America needs to move beyond criticizing President George W. Bush. Yes, the purported threat of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction was based on poor intelligence and did not materialize. But it's also true that Coalition forces toppled a brutal dictator and introduced Iraq and Afghanistan to democracy, which, if successful, may spill into nearby nations, making the world safer.

Unfortunately, democracy can't be thrust on people who think of security only in tribal terms. Democracy involves a lot more than casting ballots or people wildly demanding change in the streets. It requires rule of law, enfranchisement of minorities, intolerance of corruption, a free press, private property rights, religious liberty, and a transparent economy.

Geographical Perspective

Why has the Arab world been eclipsed by the West and so many East Asian nations? Mort Zuckerman, editor in chief of *U.S. News and World Report*, perhaps said it most aptly: "Their governments are inept and undemocratic . . . their societies riddled by class privilege and corruption, their economies inefficient and backward. . . . Their problem is systemic: Until they shed their neurotic and outmoded resentment of the rest of the world, they will fail."²

Bernard Lewis, a leading Middle East scholar, states that the total non-fossil fuel exports of the Arab countries (about 300 million people) amount to less than those of Finland, a country of only five million inhabitants.³ Brigitte Gabriel, raised amid Lebanon's civil war, points out that in 1998, a grand total of three technology patents were granted to the entire Arab world, whereas the Republic of Korea, with about one-eighth the population, received 779. Moreover, one-third of Arab men and half of Arab women are illiterate.⁴

Too often, Arab leaders stand silent or, worse join the hatred when their people lash out. Radical Shiites imposed harsh Sharia law in Iran and have de facto control of Lebanon through funding the

¹ http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/feb09/STARTIII_Feb09_rpt.pdf

² Mort Zuckerman, "The Triumph of Desert Storm," *U.S. News and World Report*, March 11, 1991, 76.

³ Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴ Brigitte Gabriel, *Because They Hate* (New York: St. Martins Press, 2006).

terrorist organization Party of God, more commonly known as Hezbollah. Iran also funds Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Palestinian Hamas, the Zionist Resistance Movement. In Iraq, the Shiite majority, currently led by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, will stay in power whether democracy succeeds or not.

The Sunnis, who are the vast majority of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims, have plenty of radicals of their own. Salafism (also known as "Wahhabism"), a conservative branch of Sunni Islam, is the state religion of Saudi Arabia. Radical Sunnis control Syria via the Baath Party, and the Gaza Strip via Hamas. Indeed, the United States' two archenemies, al-Qaeda and the Taliban, are Sunni. Al-Qaeda was spawned primarily by Arabs, the Taliban by Pakistanis. And the Taliban continues to threaten Pakistan, a dubious U.S. ally whose popular support for our policies has dipped to the lowest among our Muslim allies.⁵

Where Do We Go from Here?

We are waging our fight against terrorism conventionally, in much the same way we fought in Vietnam. This type of warfare—pitting riflemen against riflemen—produces high casualties and plays into the enemy's strength of tolerating losses that we would find unacceptable. And as in Vietnam, we assured the Iraqis and Afghans that their struggle was vital to *our* security, which encouraged both nations to let us carry the fight.

This strategy won't work. We must limit our military activity to those arenas where we can wield superior weaponry. Protracted guerrilla wars are wars of attrition, and winning requires the support of the people. If the local people are unwilling to step forward in adequate numbers with adequate determination to win their own fight, we must cut to the chase and recognize, in months rather than years, that they were never really motivated to begin with. We can still support those whose aims coincide with ours, but only with arms—not with more of our sons' and daughters' blood.

We lost the Vietnam War, but we won the larger Cold War because the Soviets' economy imploded. We can win this war by focusing on our real fight: the global economic challenge. For America to remain a beacon of hope, justice, and economic opportunity, we must reduce our national debt of \$14 trillion and promote superior education and the free market. For without an educated people and a robust economy—one supported by productivity, not by indebting ourselves to countries that do not have our best interests at heart—we will forever be obstructed by fossilized organizations such as the United Nations. Or, worse, we will lose our technological edge and fall subject to the whims of China or unscrupulous coalitions led by Russia or Iran.

Our war against terrorism has diverted too much of our human and economic capital (\$1.2 trillion for Iraq and Afghanistan so far, according to the Congressional Budget Office). Why can't our Arab allies send troops or deliver the financial aid they promised following Saddam Hussein's fall in 2003? We must acknowledge that we can't win this war with infantry and tanks. We can lose it, though—by being afraid to call the terrorists what they are, by not acknowledging that we're

⁵ Pew Research Center Global Attitude Project, "Obama More Popular Abroad than at Home, Global Image of U.S. Continues to Benefit," June 17, 2010, <http://pewglobal.org/files/pdf/Pew-Global-Attitudes-Spring-2010-Report.pdf> (accessed Aug. 27, 2010).

fighting radical Islamists, or by thinking we can appease those same radicals by closing Gitmo. Terrorists captured abroad have a special status. They're not POWs, nor are they domestic criminals, who have the U.S. constitutional right to be imprisoned here. Gitmo provides an optimum remote and secure environment safely operated by the military. And meanwhile, we can still take the fight to our enemies as we did with Osama Bin Laden, not with regular military forces but covertly through the CIA, State Department, FBI and special-ops soldiers, or by tactical air strikes.

Yes, many Muslims hate us. But we would do well to remember that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 came not from enemy combatants living abroad but from civilians *living here*. And those who tried to destroy our transatlantic aircraft with liquid explosives in 2006, as well as those who planned mass murder at Kennedy Airport and Fort Dix in 2007, were well-educated Muslim citizens from friendly nations. And the 2007 suicidal firebombing at Glasgow Airport and the thwarted attack at London's Luton Airport, as well as the 2009 Fort Hood massacre, were by Muslim medical doctors residing in country. In 2010, we had the failed car bombing at Times Square, also by someone of privilege, wealth, and a good education, who lived right here.

In the introduction of the *U.S. Army / Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, Sarah Sewall states the need for "U.S. forces to make securing the civilian, rather than destroying the enemy, their top priority. The civilian population is the center of gravity—the deciding factor in the struggle. . . . Civilian deaths create an extended family of enemies—new insurgent recruits or informants—and erode support of the host nation." Sewall sums up the book's key points on how to win this battle: "Sometimes, the more you protect your force, the less secure you may be. . . . Sometimes, the more force is used, the less effective it is. . . . The more successful the counterinsurgency is, the less force can be used and the more risk must be accepted. . . . Sometimes, doing nothing is the best reaction."⁶ This strategy, often termed "courageous restraint," has certainly led to some success on the Middle East battlefield, yet it fails to address the central truth: the terrorists we face are mostly homegrown.

First Vietnam and now our "war on terror" should be teaching us to choose both the battle and the way we fight it very carefully. Nation building is enormously expensive. And in a country hopelessly mired in corruption, tribalism, religious strife, and just plain old reactionary intransigence, it's flat-out impossible. Sometimes, doing little or nothing abroad is the best course. Keeping 47,000 U.S. troops in Iraq and 96,000 in Afghanistan only diverts us from focusing our brains, brawn, and technology on the real threat: domestic security and the global economic challenge. And this misallocation of our resources enables our real enemies to laugh while we continue to bleed. America is a big country. We can admit our mistakes, step away from peripheral fights, and still stand tall.

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⁶ Sarah Sewall, introduction to *The U.S. Army / Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

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