

# **BOUNDING THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM**

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## FOREWORD

The United States is now in the third year of the global war on terrorism. That war began as a fight against the organization that perpetrated the heinous attacks of September 11, 2001, but soon became a much more ambitious enterprise, encompassing, among other things, an invasion and occupation of Iraq. As part of the war on terrorism, the United States has committed not only to ridding the world of terrorism as a means of violence but also to transforming Iraq into a prosperous democratic beacon for the rest of the autocratically ruled and economically stagnant Middle East to follow.

Dr. Jeffrey Record examines three features of the war on terrorism as currently defined and conducted: (1) the administration's postulation of the terrorist threat, (2) the scope and feasibility of U.S. war aims, and (3) the war's political, fiscal, and military sustainability. He finds that the war on terrorism—as opposed to the campaign against al-Qaeda—lacks strategic clarity, embraces unrealistic objectives, and may not be sustainable over the long haul. He calls for down-sizing the scope of the war on terrorism to reflect concrete U.S. security interests and the limits of American military power.

The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to offer this monograph as a contribution to the national security debate over the aims and course of the war on terrorism.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

JEFFREY RECORD joined the Strategic Studies Institute in August 2003 as Visiting Research Professor. He is a professor in the Department of Strategy and International Security at the US Air Force's Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama. He is the author of six books and a dozen monographs, including: *Making War, Thinking History: Munich, Vietnam, and Presidential Uses of Force from Korea to Kosovo*; *Revising US Military Strategy: Tailoring Means to Ends*; *Beyond Military Reform*; *Hollow Victory, A Contrary View of the Gulf War*; *The Wrong War, Why We Lost in Vietnam*; and *Failed States and Casualty Phobia, Implications for U.S. Force Structure and Technology Choices*. Dr. Record has served as Assistant Province Advisor in the Mekong Delta during the Vietnam War, Rockefeller Younger Scholar on the Brookings Institution's Defense Analysis Staff, and Senior Fellow at the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, the Hudson Institute, and the BDM International Corporation. He also has extensive Capitol Hill experience, serving as Legislative Assistant for National Security Affairs to Senators Sam Nunn and Lloyd Bentsen, and later as a Professional Staff Member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Dr. Record received his Doctorate at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

## SUMMARY

In the wake of the September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the United States, the U.S. Government declared a global war on terrorism (GWOT). The nature and parameters of that war, however, remain frustratingly unclear. The administration has postulated a multiplicity of enemies, including rogue states; weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferators; terrorist organizations of global, regional, and national scope; and terrorism itself. It also seems to have conflated them into a monolithic threat, and in so doing has subordinated strategic clarity to the moral clarity it strives for in foreign policy and may have set the United States on a course of open-ended and gratuitous conflict with states and nonstate entities that pose no serious threat to the United States.

Of particular concern has been the conflation of al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's Iraq as a single, undifferentiated terrorist threat. This was a strategic error of the first order because it ignored critical differences between the two in character, threat level, and susceptibility to U.S. deterrence and military action. The result has been an unnecessary preventive war of choice against a deterred Iraq that has created a new front in the Middle East for Islamic terrorism and diverted attention and resources away from securing the American homeland against further assault by an undeterrable al-Qaeda. The war against Iraq was not integral to the GWOT, but rather a detour from it.

Additionally, most of the GWOT's declared objectives, which include the destruction of al-Qaeda and other transnational terrorist organizations, the transformation of Iraq into a prosperous, stable democracy, the democratization of the rest of the autocratic Middle East, the eradication of terrorism as a means of irregular warfare, and the (forcible, if necessary) termination of WMD proliferation to real and potential enemies worldwide, are unrealistic and condemn the United States to a hopeless quest for absolute security. As such, the GWOT's goals are also politically, fiscally, and militarily unsustainable.

Accordingly, the GWOT must be recalibrated to conform to concrete U.S. security interests and the limits of American power.

The specific measures required include deconflation of the threat; substitution of credible deterrence for preventive war as the primary vehicle for dealing with rogue states seeking WMD; refocus of the GWOT first and foremost on al-Qaeda, its allies, and homeland security; preparation to settle in Iraq for stability over democracy (if the choice is forced upon us) and for international rather than U.S. responsibility for Iraq's future; and finally, a reassessment of U.S. military force levels, especially ground force levels.

The GWOT as it has so far been defined and conducted is strategically unfocused, promises much more than it can deliver, and threatens to dissipate scarce U.S. military and other means over too many ends. It violates the fundamental strategic principles of discrimination and concentration.

# BOUNDING THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM

## INTRODUCTION

The great Prussian philosopher of war, Carl von Clausewitz, believed that the “first, the supreme, most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and the commander have to make is to establish the kind of war on which they are embarking, neither mistaking it for, not trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its true nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.”<sup>1</sup>

In the wake of the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, on New York’s World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the President declared a “war against terrorism of global reach.” Subsequently and repeatedly, he and other administration officials used the terms “global war on terrorism,” “war on global terrorism,” “war on terrorism,” “war on terror,” and “battle against international terrorism.” The “global war on terrorism,” complete with its acronym, GWOT, soon became the most often used term.

The nature and parameters of the GWOT, however, remain frustratingly unclear. The administration has postulated a multiplicity of enemies, including rogue states, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferators, terrorist organizations, and terrorism itself. It has also, at least for the purposes of mobilizing and sustaining domestic political support for the war on Iraq and other potential preventive military actions, conflated them as a general, undifferentiated threat. In so doing, the administration has arguably subordinated strategic clarity to the moral clarity it seeks in foreign policy and may have set the United States on a path of open-ended and unnecessary conflict with states and nonstate entities that pose no direct or imminent threat to the United States.

Sound strategy mandates threat discrimination and reasonable harmonization of ends and means. The GWOT falls short on both counts. Indeed, it may be misleading to cast the GWOT as a war; the military’s role in the GWOT is still a work in progress, and the military’s “comfort level” with it is any event problematic. Moreover, to the extent that the GWOT is directed at the phenomenon of terrorism, as opposed to flesh-and-blood terrorist organizations,

it sets itself up for strategic failure. Terrorism is a recourse of the politically desperate and militarily helpless, and, as such, it is hardly going to disappear. The challenge of grasping the nature and parameters of the GWOT is certainly not eased by the absence of a commonly accepted definition of terrorism or by the depiction of the GWOT as a Manichaean struggle between good and evil, "us" versus "them."

This monograph examines the GWOT from three vantage points: (1) threat postulation, (2) the scope and feasibility of its objectives, and (3) its political, fiscal, and military sustainability. What are the postulated threats and their relation to one another, and have they been soundly prioritized? What are the aims of the GWOT and how and by what means, military and other, are they to be achieved? Are political ends and the military component of the means in reasonable harmony, or has the United States bitten off more than it can chew? Is the GWOT politically sustainable at home and abroad, and if not, should the GWOT's ambitious goals be adjusted to conform to the limits of political tolerance and U.S. military power?

## **WAR AND TERRORISM**

Before turning to these matters, however, we must address two issues that continue to impede understanding of the GWOT: its incomplete characterization as a war, and the absence of an agreed upon definition of terrorism.

### **Is the GWOT a War?**

American political discourse over the past several decades has embraced "war" as a metaphor for dealing with all kinds of "enemies," domestic and foreign. One cannot, it seems, be serious about dealing with this or that problem short of making "war" on it. Political administrations accordingly have declared "war" on poverty, illiteracy, crime, drugs--and now terrorism. Even political campaign headquarters have "war rooms," and "war" is a term used increasingly to describe bitter partisan disputes on Capitol Hill. "War" is perhaps the most over-used metaphor in America.

Traditionally, however, war has involved military operations



between states or between a state and an insurgent enemy for ultimate control of that state. In both cases the primary medium for war has been combat between fielded military forces, be they regular (state) or irregular (nonstate) forces. Yet terrorist organizations do not field military forces as such and, in the case of al-Qaeda and its associated partners, are trans-state organizations that are pursuing nonterritorial ends. As such, and given their secretive, cellular, dispersed, and decentralized “order of battle,” they are not subject to conventional military destruction.

Indeed, the key to their defeat lies in the realms of intelligence and police work, with military forces playing an important but nonetheless supporting role. Beyond the military destruction of al-Qaeda’s training and planning base in Afghanistan, good intelligence--and luck--has formed the basis of virtually every other U.S. success against al-Qaeda. Intelligence-based arrests and assassinations, not divisions destroyed or ships sunk, are the cutting edge of successful counterterrorism. If there is an analogy for the GWOT, it is the international war on illicit narcotics.

But these “wars” on terrorism and drugs are not really wars as most Americans, including the professional military, have come to understand the meaning of the term since the United States became a world power. By traditional standards of what constitutes a war, the GWOT, like the drug war, qualifies, in so far as it encompasses the military’s participation, as a “military operation other than war,” or MOOTW (to employ an officially discarded but very useful term.) To be sure, the GWOT has so far encompassed two major military campaigns, in Afghanistan and Iraq, but those campaigns were part of a much broader grand strategy and struggle that has mobilized all elements of national power as well as the services of many other countries. The proper analogy here may be the Cold War, a much larger and longer contest than the occasional hot wars--e.g., the Korean and Vietnam conflicts--that were waged on its behalf. Moreover, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM saddled the U.S. armed forces, especially the U.S. Army, with costly and open-ended imperial policing and nation-building responsibilities outside the professional military’s traditional mission portfolio. The major combat operational phase of the war against Iraq unexpectedly and seamlessly morphed into an ongoing insurgent phase for which

most U.S. ground combat forces are not properly trained.

Traditionally, most wars, especially those waged in the European tradition, have also had clear beginnings and endings. On a certain day hostilities were declared or initiated, and on another certain day one side agreed to stop fighting. But the line between war and peace was never as clear in the non-European world, and has been steadily blurring for the United States since the end of the Cold War in part because it is difficult to obtain conclusive military victories against irregular enemies who refuse to quit precisely because they cannot be decisively defeated. Thus even though the Taliban and Saddam Hussein regimes were militarily smashed, combat continues, even escalates, in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Traditional wars also provided clear standards of measuring success in the form of territory gained and enemy forces destroyed or otherwise removed from combat. But these standards were always of limited utility against irregular enemies that fought to different standards of success, and they are of practically no use in gauging success against a terrorist threat like al-Qaeda. Terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman notes that terrorists “do not function in the open as armed units, generally do not attempt to seize or hold territory, deliberately avoid engaging enemy military forces in combat and rarely exercise any direct control or sovereignty over either territory or population.”<sup>2</sup> Additionally, al-Qaeda has demonstrated impressive regenerative powers, in part because, as Daniel Byman points out, it is:

not just a distinct terrorist organization: it is a movement that seeks to inspire and coordinate other groups and individuals. Even if Al-Qaeda is taking losses beyond its ability to recuperate, there is still a much broader Islamist movement that is hostile to the United States, seeks to overthrow U.S. allies and is committed to mass casualty terrorist violence. . . . The conceptual key is this: Al-Qaeda is not a single terrorist group but a global insurgency.<sup>3</sup>

Against such an enemy, tallies of dead and captured are dubious, although the capture of al-Qaeda leaders contributes to success by removing dangerous operatives from circulation and providing new sources of intelligence on al-Qaeda. The analogy here is the failure of the body-count standard in Vietnam. The United States

confronted in the Vietnamese Communists, as in the fight against al-Qaeda, an enemy of extraordinary tenacity and discipline that was more than capable of replacing the great losses inflicted by the U.S. forces. (A strategy of attrition, which the United States pursued in Vietnam, is problematic against an enemy able to control his losses by retaining the tactical and operational initiative. In the Vietnam War, Communist forces initiated 75-80 percent of all firefights and generally did not hesitate to break off action when losses approached the unacceptable.<sup>4</sup>)

The ultimate measure of success in the GWOT will be diminished incidence and scope of terrorist attacks--i.e., nonoccurring events. From an analytical standpoint, however, this is an unsatisfactory measure of success. As in the case of gauging the success of deterrence, which also rests on nonevents, there is no way to prove a cause and effect relationship. Moreover, even manifestly disruptive counterterrorist operations can have self-defeating unintended consequences. In the wake of the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, which the administration hailed as a great victory in the GWOT, the International Institute for Strategic Studies issued a report concluding that, notwithstanding al-Qaeda's loss of its infrastructure in Afghanistan and the killing or capture of perhaps one-third of its leadership, al-Qaeda is "now reconstituted and doing business in a somewhat different manner, but more insidious and just as dangerous as in its pre-11 September incarnation." More insidious because the West's "counter-terrorism effort . . . perversely impelled an already highly decentralized and elusive transnational terrorist network to become even harder to identify and neutralize." Among other things, the destruction of its camps in Afghanistan meant that al-Qaeda "no longer concentrated its forces in clusters discernible and targetable from the air," which in turn meant that the "lion's share of the counter-terrorism burden rested on law enforcement and intelligence agencies."<sup>5</sup>

It should be noted that the President, though apparently wedded to the use of the term "war," clearly recognizes that the GWOT is "a new kind of war fought by a new kind of enemy,"<sup>6</sup> a statement that echoed the Secretary of Defense's observation just weeks after the 9/11 attacks, that "this will be a war like none other our nation has faced. . . . Our opponent is a global network of terrorist organizations

and their state sponsors. . . . Even the vocabulary of this war will be different.”<sup>7</sup>

In sum, the GWOT contains elements of war and nonwar. It is an orchestrated *mélange* of combat operations, military operations other than war, and operations conducted by various nonmilitary departments of government. Colin Gray observes:

The conflict with global terrorism . . . bears more resemblance to a protracted hunt than it does to what most people understandably call a war. The cutting edge of the counterterrorist effort is likely to be intelligence, especially multinational cooperation on intelligence, and muscular policework. All of which is fairly plausible, but it is by no means certain that U.S. national security strategy reduces to chasing terrorists of no fixed abode. Terrorists and their backers do provide some targets for military action, and the jury will long be out on just how significant a challenge they pose to American vital interests, including the world order of which the United States is the principal guardian.<sup>8</sup>

## **What Is Terrorism?**

Sound strategy requires a clear definition of the enemy. The GWOT, however, is a war on something whose definition is mired in a semantic swamp. Even inside the U.S. Government, different departments and agencies use different definitions reflecting different professional perspectives on the subject.<sup>9</sup> A 1988 study counted 109 definitions of terrorism that covered a total of 22 different definitional elements.<sup>10</sup> Terrorism expert Walter Laqueur also has counted over 100 definitions and concludes that the “only general characteristic generally agreed upon is that terrorism involves violence and the threat of violence.”<sup>11</sup> Yet terrorism is hardly the only enterprise involving violence and the threat of violence. So does war, coercive diplomacy, and barroom brawls.

The current U.S. national security strategy defines terrorism as simply “premeditated, politically motivated violence against innocents.”<sup>12</sup> This definition, however, begs the question of who is innocent and by what standards is innocence determined. The U.S. firebombing of Japanese cities in 1945 certainly terrified their inhabitants, many of whom were women and children who had

nothing to do with Japan's war effort. And what about *threatened* as opposed to actual violence? Is not the inducement of fear a major object of terrorism, and is not threatened action a way of inducing fear? Is not the very threat of terrorist attack terrorism?

The Defense Department officially defines terrorism as the "calculated use of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or intimidate governments or societies in pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological."<sup>13</sup> The U.S. *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* places similar emphasis on terrorism as a nonstate phenomenon directed against the state and society; terrorism is "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents."<sup>14</sup>

The problem with both these definitions is that they exclude state terrorism, which since the French Revolution has claimed far more victims--in the tens of millions--than terrorism perpetrated by nonstate actors. The lethality of the likes of al-Qaeda, the Tamil Tigers, and Sendero Luminoso pales before the governmental terrorism of Stalinist Russia, Mao's China, Pol Pot's Cambodia, and of course Saddam Hussein's Iraq. By excluding state terrorism these definitions moreover give states facing violent internal challenges, even challenges based on legitimate grievances (e.g., Kurdish and Shiite uprisings against Saddam Hussein), the benefit of the moral doubt, and in so doing invite such states to label their internal challenges "terrorism" and to employ whatever means they deem necessary, including the terrorism of counterterrorist operations of the kind practiced by the French in Algeria and the Russians in Chechnya.

Perhaps inadvertently, the contemporary language on terrorism has become, as Conor Gearty puts it, "the rhetorical servant of the established order, whatever and however heinous its own activities are." Because the administration has cast terrorism and terrorists as always the vilest of evils, what the terrorist does "is always wrong [and] what the counter-terrorist has to do to defeat them is therefore invariably, necessarily right. The nature of the [established] regime, the kind of action that is possible against it, the moral situation in which violence occurs--none of these complicating elements matters a jot against the contemporary power of the terrorist label."<sup>15</sup> Thus

Palestinian terrorism is condemned while Ariel Sharon is hailed as a man of peace. Richard Falk observes that:

“Terrorism” as a word and concept became associated in US and Israeli discourse with anti-state forms of violence that were so criminal that any method of enforcement and retaliation was viewed as acceptable, and not subject to criticism. By so appropriating the meaning of this inflammatory term in such a self-serving manner, terrorism became detached from its primary historical association dating back to the French Revolution. In that formative setting, the state’s own political violence against its citizens, violence calculated to induce widespread fear and achieve political goals, was labeled as terrorism.<sup>16</sup>

The definitional mire that surrounds terrorism stems in large measure from differing perspectives on the moral relationship between objectives sought and means employed. It is easy for the politically satisfied and militarily powerful to pronounce all terrorism evil regardless of circumstance, but, like it or not, those at the other end of the spectrum are bound to see things differently. Condemning all terrorism as unconditionally evil strips it of political context and ignores its inherent attraction to the militarily helpless. This is not to condone terrorism; it is simply to recognize that it can reflect rational policy choice.

Terrorism, like guerrilla warfare, is a form of irregular warfare,<sup>17</sup> or “small war” so defined by C. E. Callwell in his classic 1896 work, *Small Wars, Their Principles and Practice*, as “all campaigns other than those where both sides consist of regular troops.”<sup>18</sup> As such, terrorism, like guerrilla warfare, is a weapon of the weak against a “regular” (i.e., conventional) enemy that cannot be defeated on his own terms or quickly. Absent any prospect of a political solution, what options other than irregular warfare, including terrorism (often a companion of guerrilla warfare), are available to the politically desperate and militarily helpless? Was Jewish terrorism against British rule in Palestine, such as the 1946 Irgun bombing attack (led by future Nobel Peace Prize Winner Menachem Begin) on the King David Hotel in Jerusalem (killing 93, including 17 Jews),<sup>19</sup> justified as a means of securing an independent Jewish state? “Terrorism may be the only feasible means of overthrowing a cruel dictatorship, the



last resort of free men and women facing intolerable persecution,” argues Laqueur. “In such conditions, terrorism could be a moral imperative rather than a crime--the killing of Hitler or Stalin early on in his career would have saved the lives of millions of people.”<sup>20</sup> In short, in circumstances where the choice is between one of two evils, might selection of a lesser evil be justified? The United States chose to fight alongside Stalin to defeat Hitler, and it effectively became a co-belligerent with Saddam Hussein in Iraq’s war with the Ayatollah Khomeini’s Iran. In both cases, the United States allied itself with two of the 20th century’s greatest practitioners of state terrorism for the purpose of defeating what it at the time regarded as the greater evil.

Morally black and white choices are scarce in a gray world. One man’s terrorist can in fact be another’s patriot. “Is an armed Kurd a freedom fighter in Iraq but a terrorist in Turkey?” asks Tony Judt. “Were al-Qaeda volunteers terrorists when they joined the U.S. financed war [against the Soviets] in Afghanistan?”<sup>21</sup>

To be sure, consensus on the definition of terrorism is hardly necessary to prosecute counterterrorist operations against specific terrorist organizations. We know a terrorist act when we see one, and we know that al-Qaeda is an enemy. But lack of definitional consensus does impede the study of terrorism, which is a necessary component of dealing with the phenomenon itself.

## **THE GWOT: THREAT POSTULATION**

### **Identifying the Threats.**

The administration has elaborated its views on the GWOT, including the threat to which the GWOT is a response, in a host of public statements and documents, including *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* and *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*. Chapter III of *The National Security Strategy*, titled “Strengthen Alliances to Defeat Global Terrorism and Work to Prevent Attacks Against Us and Our Friends,” begins with the following excerpt from President Bush’s speech at Washington’s National Cathedral on September 14, 2001:

Just three days removed from these events, Americans do not yet have the distance of history. But our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil.<sup>22</sup>

Chapter III then goes on to declare:

The United States is fighting a war against terrorism of global reach. The enemy is not a single political regime or person or religion or ideology. The enemy is terrorism--premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against innocents.

In many regions, lasting grievances prevent the emergence of a lasting peace. Such grievances deserve to be, and must be, addressed within a political process. But no cause justifies terror. The United States will make no concessions to terrorist demands and strike no deals with them. We make no distinction between terrorists and those who knowingly harbor or provide aid to them.<sup>23</sup>

Chapter V, "Preventing Our Enemies from Threatening Us, Our Allies, and Our Friends with Weapons of Mass Destruction," links terrorism, rogue states, and WMD. In the wake of the Cold War's demise,

new deadly challenges have emerged from rogue states and terrorists. None of these contemporary threats rival the sheer destructive power arrayed against us by the Soviet Union. However, the nature and motivations of these new adversaries, their determination to obtain destructive power hitherto available only to the world's strongest states, and the greater likelihood that they will use weapons of mass destruction against us, make today's security environment more complex and dangerous.<sup>24</sup>

Rogue states are those states that:

- brutalize their own people and squander their national resources for the personal gain of the rulers;
- display no regard for international law, threaten their neighbors, and callously violate international treaties to which they are party;
- are determined to acquire weapons of mass destruction, along with other advanced military technology, to be used as threats or offensively to achieve the aggressive designs of these regimes;



- sponsor terrorism around the globe; and,
- reject basic human values and hate the United States and everything for which it stands.<sup>25</sup>

*The National Security Strategy* identifies Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as rogue states, and declares, “[W]e must be prepared to stop rogue states and their terrorist clients before they are able to threaten or use weapons of mass destruction against the United States and our allies and friends.”<sup>26</sup> And this means, “[g]iven the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the United States can no longer solely rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past.”<sup>27</sup> Because our enemies see WMD not as means of last resort, but rather “as weapons of choice . . . [as] tools of intimidation and military aggression,” the “United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.”<sup>28</sup>

The core of the threat is the potential marriage of political/religious extremism and WMD, or what the President has called “the crossroads of radicalism and technology,” and the threat is so grave that “America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed.”<sup>29</sup> In his West Point speech of June 2002, the President elaborated: “When the spread of chemical and biological and nuclear weapons, along with ballistic missile technology--when that occurs, even weak states and small groups could attain a catastrophic power to strike great nations.”<sup>30</sup> The Secretary of Defense subsequently spoke of a “nexus between terrorist networks, terrorist states, and weapons of mass destruction . . . that can make mighty adversaries of small or impoverished states and even relatively small groups of individuals.”<sup>31</sup>

*National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* is a detailed plan of action. The document defines terrorism as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents,”<sup>32</sup> and declares: “Our goal will be reached when Americans and other civilized people around the world can lead their lives free of fear from terrorist attacks.”<sup>33</sup> It pledges “a strategy of direct and continuous action against terrorist groups, the cumulative effect of which will initially disrupt, over time degrade, and ultimately destroy the terrorist organizations.”<sup>34</sup> The document’s “Introduction” closes by referencing “the power of

humanity to defeat terrorism in all its forms.”<sup>35</sup>

*National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* then proceeds to assess the nature of the terrorist threat today, including its globalization, the interconnectedness of terrorist organizations, and the proliferation of WMD. “The terrorist threat is a flexible, transnational network structure, enabled by modern technology and characterized by loose interconnectivity both within and between groups.”<sup>36</sup> Terrorist organizations operate at three levels. “At the first level are those terrorist organizations that operate primarily within a single country. Their reach is limited, but in this global environment their actions can have international consequences.” Next are those organizations that “operate regionally . . . transcend[ing] at least one international boundary.” Third are “terrorist organizations with global reach. Their operations span several regions and their ambitions can be transnational and even global.”<sup>37</sup>

Yet all three types of organizations are directly linked by such operational cooperation as “sharing intelligence, personnel, expertise, resources, and safe havens” and indirectly connected through “promot[ion of] the same ideological agenda and reinforce[ment of] each other’s efforts to cultivate a favorable international image for their ‘cause’.” Accordingly, the United States “must pursue them across the geographic spectrum to ensure that all linkages between the strong and the weak organizations are broken, leaving each of them isolated, exposed, and vulnerable to defeat.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, the nexus of national, regional, and global terrorism is such that terrorism of global reach cannot be defeated without simultaneous counterterrorism operations against its regional and national props. This judgment is emphatic in an accompanying schematic, entitled “Operationalizing the Strategy,” which depicts the progressive severance of linkages between global and regional--and then regional and national--organizations and the concomitant destruction or disappearance of all but a few mostly low-threat state level terrorist organizations.<sup>39</sup> Thus the strategy encompasses potential counterterrorist operations against any and all terrorist organizations regardless of whether they pose a threat to U.S. interests. The only apparent constraint on the strategy is resource availability.

*National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* concludes that because

“we cannot tolerate terrorists who seek to combine the powers of modern technology and WMD to threaten the very notion of a civilized society. . . we must persevere until the United States, together with its friends and allies, eliminates terrorism as a threat to our way of life.”<sup>40</sup> But defeating terrorism is more than just an end in itself:

ridding the world of terrorism is essential to a broader purpose. We strive to build an international order where more countries and peoples are integrated into a world consistent with the values we share with our partners--values such as human dignity, rule of law, respect for individual liberties, open and free economies, and religious tolerance. We understand that a world in which these values are embraced as standards, not exceptions, will be the best antidote to the spread of terrorism. This is the world we must build today.<sup>41</sup>

### **Conflating the Threats.**

The administration has thus postulated a broad, international terrorist threat to U.S. national security interests that encompasses (1) three geographic levels of terrorist organizations--national, regional, and global, as well as (2) rogue states--specifically Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. Also on the threat list are (3) any individuals or entities that proliferate WMD to terrorist organizations or rogue states, and (4) failed states, like the Taliban’s Afghanistan, that may not sponsor terrorism overseas but that willingly or unwillingly provide safe haven and assistance to organizations that do.

Discrimination, however, is not the first word that comes to mind in examining the administration’s language on terrorism. Administration rhetoric is not clear, for example, on the matter of whether there are strategically and operationally consequential differences between terrorist organizations and rogue states. Rogue states, after all, declares *The National Security Strategy*, “brutalize their own people” and “sponsor terrorism around the globe.” Additionally, rogue states and at least some terrorist organizations with global reach share both a hatred of the United States and a desire to acquire WMD. The administration believes rogue states

and terrorist organizations also share another critical attribute: some measure of immunity from deterrence.

In the Cold War, we faced a generally status-quo, risk-averse adversary. Deterrence was an effective defense. But deterrence based only on the threat of retaliation is less likely to work against leaders of rogue states more willing to take risks, gambling with the lives of their people, and the wealth of their nations.

Traditional concepts of deterrence will not work against a terrorist enemy whose avowed tactics are wanton destruction and the targeting of innocents; whose so-called soldiers seek martyrdom in death and whose most potent protection is statelessness.<sup>42</sup>

As it approached war with Iraq, the administration insisted on co-conspiratorial links between the Saddam Hussein regime and al-Qaeda; repeatedly raised the specter of the dictator's transfer of WMD to al-Qaeda; and encouraged the view that Saddam Hussein had a direct hand in the 9/11 attacks. At war's end, it hailed the regime's destruction as a victory in the war on terrorism.

In September 2002, President Bush declared, "You can't distinguish between al Qaeda and Saddam when you talk about the war on terrorism. They're both equally as bad, and equally as evil, and equally as destructive." He added that "the danger is that al-Qaeda becomes an extension of Saddam's madness and his hatred and his capacity to extend weapons of mass destruction around the world."<sup>43</sup>

In a formal news conference on March 6, 2003, just days before he launched Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, the President linked the case for war against Iraq to the 9/11 attacks, implying that Saddam Hussein would replicate them once he got nuclear weapons. "Saddam is a threat. And we're not going to wait until he does attack," he declared. "Saddam Hussein and his weapons [of mass destruction] are a direct threat to this country," he reiterated. "If the world fails to confront the threat posed by the Iraqi regime . . . free nations would assume immense and unacceptable risks. The attacks of September 11, 2001, showed what enemies of America did with four airplanes. We will not wait to see what . . . terrorist states could do with weapons of mass destruction." Later on, he stated:

Saddam Hussein is a threat to our nation. September the 11th changed the--the strategic thinking, at least as far as I was concerned, for how to protect the country . . . Used to be that we could think that you could contain a person like Saddam Hussein, that oceans would protect us from his type of terror. September the 11<sup>th</sup> should say to the American people that we're now a battlefield, that weapons of mass destruction in the hands of a terrorist organization could be deployed here at home.

When asked about the possible human and financial cost of a war with Iraq, President Bush answered, "The price of doing nothing exceeds the price of taking action. . . . The price of the attacks on America . . . on September 11th [was] enormous. . . . And I'm not willing to take that chance again." "The lesson of September the 11th . . . is that we're vulnerable to attack . . . and we must take threats which gather overseas very seriously."<sup>44</sup>

On May 1, 2003, President Bush, in declaring an end to major combat operations in Iraq, stated that the "battle of Iraq is one victory in the war on terror that began on September 11, 2001--and still goes on. That terrible morning, 19 evil men--the shock troops of a hateful ideology--gave America and the civilized world a glimpse of their ambitions." Bush later added:

The liberation of Iraq is a crucial advance in the campaign against terror. We've removed an ally of al Qaeda, and cut off a source of terrorist funding. And this much is certain: No terrorist network will gain weapons of mass destruction from the Iraqi regime, because the regime is no more. In this 19 months [since the 9/11 attacks] that changed the world, our actions have been focused and deliberate and proportionate to the offense . . . .With those attacks, the terrorists and their supporters declared war on the United States. And war is what they got.<sup>45</sup>

The President thus postulated, at least with respect to the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda, a monolithic, direct terrorist threat to the United States in the form of undeterrable WMD attacks. By implication, the threat extended to Iran and North Korea as well, because as rogue states they, too, like Saddam's Iraq, regard WMD "as weapons of choice," as "tools of intimidation and military aggression" that could "allow these states to attempt to blackmail the

United States and our allies to prevent us from deterring or repelling the aggressive behavior of rogue states."<sup>46</sup> Thus, *as threats*, terrorists, terrorist organizations, and terrorist states are one and the same.

### **Consequences of a Conflated Threat.**

Unfortunately, stapling together rogue states and terrorist organizations with different agendas and threat levels to the United States as an undifferentiated threat obscures critical differences among rogues states, among terrorist organizations, and between rogue states and terrorist groups. One is reminded of the postulation of an international Communist monolith in the 1950s which blinded American policymakers to the influence and uniqueness of local circumstances and to key national, historical, and cultural differences and antagonisms within the "Bloc." Communism was held to be a centrally directed international conspiracy; a Communist anywhere was a Communist everywhere, and all posed an equal threat to America's security. A result of this inability to discriminate was disastrous U.S. military intervention in Vietnam against an enemy perceived to be little more than an extension of Kremlin designs in Southeast Asia and thus by definition completely lacking an historically comprehensible political agenda of its own.

Both terrorist organizations and rogue states embrace violence and are hostile to the existing international order. Many share a common enemy in the United States and, for rogue states and terrorist organizations in the Middle East, a common enemy in Israel. As international pariahs they are often in contact with one another and at times even cooperate. But the scope and endurance of such cooperation is highly contingent on local circumstances. More to the point, rogue states and terrorist organizations are fundamentally different in *character* and *vulnerability to U.S. military power*. Terrorist organizations are secretive, elusive, nonstate entities that characteristically possess little in the way of assets that can be held hostage; as *The National Security Strategy* points out, a terrorist enemy's "most potent protection is statelessness."<sup>47</sup> In contrast, rogue states are sovereign entities defined by specific territories, populations, governmental infrastructures, and other assets; as such, they are much more exposed to decisive military attack than terrorist

organizations.

Or to put it another way, unlike terrorist organizations, rogue states, notwithstanding administration declamations to the contrary, *are subject to effective deterrence and therefore do not warrant status as potential objects of preventive war and its associated costs and risks.* One does not doubt for a moment that al-Qaeda, had it possessed a deliverable nuclear weapon, would have used it on 9/11. But the record for rogue states is clear: none has ever used WMD against an adversary capable of inflicting unacceptable retaliatory damage. Saddam Hussein did use chemical weapons in the 1980s against helpless Kurds and Iranian infantry; however, he refrained from employing such weapons against either U.S. forces or Israel during the Gulf War in 1991, and he apparently abandoned even possession of such weapons sometime later in the decade.<sup>48</sup> For its part, North Korea, far better armed with WMD than Saddam Hussein's Iraq, has for decades repeatedly threatened war against South Korea and the United States but has yet to initiate one.

How is the inaction of Saddam Hussein and North Korea explained other than by successful deterrence? There is no way of proving this, of course, but there is no evidence that Saddam Hussein ever intended to initiate hostilities with the United States once he acquired a nuclear weapon; if anything, rogue state regimes see in such weapons a means of deterring *American* military action against *themselves*. Interestingly, Condoleezza Rice, just a year before she became National Security Adviser, voiced confidence in deterrence as the best means of dealing with Saddam. In January 2000 she published an article in *Foreign Affairs* in which she declared, with respect to Iraq, that "the first line of defense should be a clear and classical statement of deterrence--if they do acquire WMD, their weapons will be unusable because any attempt to use them will bring national obliteration." She added that rogue states "were living on borrowed time" and that "there should be no sense of panic about them."<sup>49</sup> If statelessness is a terrorist enemy's "most potent protection," then is not "stateness" a rogue state's most potent strategic liability?

To be sure, rogue states are inherently aggressive and threaten regional stability. Moreover, there can be no guarantee that rogue state leaders will not fall prone to recklessness, even madness,



although in the case of Saddam Hussein prewar accusations of recklessness and certainly madness were considerably overstated.<sup>50</sup> The point is that rogue state behavior so far provides no convincing evidence of immunity to deterrence via the credible threat of unacceptable retaliation. Rogue states regimes may in fact be more risk-prone than governments of “normal” states, but does that mean they do not value their own survival and are incapable of making rational calculations of ends and means?

In conflating Saddam Hussein’s Iraq and Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda, the administration unnecessarily expanded the GWOT by launching a preventive war<sup>51</sup> against a state that was not at war with the United States and that posed no direct or imminent threat to the United States at the expense of continued attention and effort to protect the United States from a terrorist organization with which the United States *was* at war. Opponents of preventive war against Iraq, including former national security advisers Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski and former secretary of state Madeleine Albright, made a clear distinction between the character, aims, and vulnerabilities of al-Qaeda and Iraq, correctly arguing that the al-Qaeda threat was much more immediate, dangerous, and difficult to defeat. They feared that a war of choice against Iraq would weaken a war of necessity against al-Qaeda by distracting America’s strategic attention to Iraq, by consuming money and resources much better applied to homeland defense, and, because an American war on Iraq was so profoundly unpopular around the world, especially among Muslims, by weakening the willingness of key countries to share intelligence information so vital to winning the war on al-Qaeda.<sup>52</sup>

Strategically, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM was not part of the GWOT; rather, it was a war-of-choice distraction from the war of necessity against al-Qaeda. Indeed, it will be much more than a distraction if the United States fails to establish order and competent governance in post-Saddam Iraq. Terrorism expert Jessica Stern in August 2003 warned that the bombing of the U.N. headquarters in Baghdad was “the latest evidence that America has taken a country that was not a terrorist threat and turned it into one.” How ironic it would be that a war initiated in the name of the GWOT ended up creating “precisely the situation the administration has described as a breeding ground for terrorists: a state unable to control its borders



or provide for its citizens' rudimentary needs."<sup>53</sup> Former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director of counterterrorism operations and analysis, Vincent Cannistraro, agrees: "There was no substantive intelligence information linking Saddam to international terrorism before the war. Now we've created the conditions that have made Iraq the place to come to attack Americans."<sup>54</sup>

## THE GWOT: OBJECTIVES

### Scope.

Threat conflation makes the GWOT a war on an "enemy" of staggering multiplicity in terms of numbers of entities (dozens of terrorist organizations and terrorist states); types (nonstate entities, states, and failed states); and geographic loci (al-Qaeda alone is believed to have cells in 60 countries). The global war on terrorism is moreover not only a war against practitioners of terrorism but also against the phenomenon of terrorism itself. The goal is the elimination of both terrorists and the method of violence they employ. *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* speaks of the imperative "to eradicate terrorism" and states that "Defeating terrorism is our nation's primary and immediate priority. It is 'our calling,' as President Bush has said."<sup>55</sup> Indeed,

We must use the full influence of the United States to delegitimize terrorism and make clear that all acts of terrorism will be viewed in the same light as slavery, piracy, or genocide: behavior that no responsible government can condone or support and all must oppose. In short, with our friends and allies, we aim to establish a new international norm regarding terrorism requiring non-support, non-tolerance, and active opposition to all terrorists.<sup>56</sup>

The goals of the GWOT also encompass regime change, forcible if necessary, in rogue states, and in the case of at least Iraq, the transformation of that country into a prosperous democracy as a precursor to the political transformation of the Middle East. Threatening or using force to topple foreign regimes is nothing new for the United States. During the 20th century, the United States promoted the overthrow of numerous regimes in Central America

and the Caribbean, and occasionally in the Eastern Hemisphere (e.g., in Iran in 1953, South Vietnam in 1963, the Philippines in 1986).

With respect to democracy, the administration believes that a politically transformed Iraq and Middle East is a GWOT imperative because it believes that the fundamental source of Islamist terrorism, including that of 9/11, is the persistence in the region of politically repressive regimes incapable of delivering economic modernity. For the administration, the political status quo in the Middle East is no longer acceptable because it produced the Islamist extremism that produced 9/11. This is why Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz declared in late July 2003 that “the battle to win the peace in Iraq now is the central battle in the war against terrorism,”<sup>57</sup> and why National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice argues that “a transformed Iraq can become a key element in a very different Middle East in which the ideologies of hate will not flourish.”<sup>58</sup> The President himself endorsed this objective before the war, in his February 26, 2003, speech before the neo-conservative American Enterprise Institute. “A liberated Iraq can show the power of freedom to transform that vital region by bringing hope and progress to the lives of millions. . . . A new [democratic] regime in Iraq could serve as a dramatic example of freedom for other nations in the region.” The President went on to cite the success of the United States in transforming defeated postwar Germany and Japan into democratic states, noting that, at the time, “many said that the cultures of Japan and Germany were incapable of sustaining democratic values.”<sup>59</sup> For the administration, the connection between tyranny and terrorism, and between “freedom” and the absence of terrorism, is clear. In his September 7, 2003, televised address to the nation, the President stated:

In Iraq, we are helping . . . to build a decent and democratic society at the center of the Middle East. . . . The Middle East will become a place of progress and peace or it will be an exporter of violence and terror that takes more lives in America and in other free nations. The triumph of democracy and tolerance in Iraq, in Afghanistan and beyond would be a grave setback for international terrorism. The terrorists thrive on the support of tyrants and the resentments of oppressed peoples. When tyrants fall, and resentment gives way to hope, men and women in every

culture reject the ideologies of terror and turn to the pursuits of peace. Everywhere that freedom takes hold, terror will retreat.<sup>60</sup>

The GWOT ledger of goals--war aims--thus far includes:

- (1) destroy the perpetrators of 9/11--i.e., al-Qaeda;
- (2) destroy or defeat other terrorist organizations of global reach, including the nexus of their regional and national analogs;
- (3) delegitimize and ultimately eradicate the phenomenon of terrorism;
- (4) transform Iraq into a prosperous, stable democracy; and,
- (5) transform the Middle East into a region of participatory self-government and economic opportunity.

But the conflation of rogue states, terrorism, and WMD, coupled with the administration's preventive war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq for the purpose of disarming that country, make the GWOT as much a war on nuclear proliferators--at least ones the United States does not like--as it is a war against terrorism itself. Because the administration sees a nexus between terrorism and WMD, the GWOT is also a global counter-proliferation war, an aggressive supplement to, perhaps even a substitute for, the arms control regime established by the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968.

Indeed, one can speculate that the 9/11 attacks, which admittedly raised the specter of nuclear-armed terrorism, afforded an already predisposed administration the political opportunity to shift to a new counter-proliferation policy based on threatened and actual preventive military action. "We will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes and terrorists to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons," declares *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction*.<sup>61</sup> That document also states: "Effective interdiction is a critical part of the U.S. strategy to combat [proliferation of] WMD and their delivery means. We must enhance [U.S.] capabilities . . . to prevent the movement of WMD materials, technology, and expertise to hostile states and terrorist organizations."<sup>62</sup> The administration is also promoting development of a new generation of small, "bunker-busting" nuclear weapons designed to threaten or destroy rogue state underground nuclear facilities (see below).

Note should be taken that the administration has displayed no

enthusiasm for arms control treaties, and that it appears to have little confidence in the NPT to prevent even signatory states (including Iraq and North Korea) from launching nuclear weapons programs in contravention of the NPT. It overlooks the NPT regime's considerable success in restricting and even reversing proliferation<sup>63</sup> and is determined to use force if necessary to do what the NPT was never designed to do. The GWOT is thus, to repeat, as much about counter-proliferation as it is about terrorism.

So a sixth objective of the GWOT can be identified: (6) halt, by force if necessary, the continued proliferation of WMD and their means of delivery to hostile and potentially hostile states and other entities.

### **Feasibility.**

How realistic are the GWOT's objectives? Judgments on this question are necessarily subjective but must be made nonetheless. Certainly objectives that seem inherently unattainable need to be identified and examined.

(1) *Destroy al-Qaeda.* Because the war against al-Qaeda is a war of necessity, the attainability of this goal is a moot issue. The United States must and will continue to fight al-Qaeda even if it cannot destroy it. The nature, modus operandi, and recruiting base of al-Qaeda make it a very difficult enemy to subdue decisively through counterterrorism operations. There have been considerable successes against al-Qaeda since 9/11--the destruction of its base in Afghanistan, the killing and capture of key operatives, the disruption of planned attacks, all of which may account for the absence of another mass-casualty attack on U.S. soil since 9/11. But al-Qaeda is also a fanatically determined foe with demonstrated recuperative powers, and its declared goals command significant and, some believe, growing political traction in the Muslim world. Moreover, the establishment of a large U.S. military presence in Iraq offers a new and proximate target set for al-Qaeda and other jihadist bombers, and the failure of that presence to stabilize Iraq eases the ability of al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda-inspired organizations to infiltrate the country and conduct their operations without detection.

On the other hand, if the administration is correct--and it may well

be--in its assumption that the ultimate source of Islamist terrorism is failed governance throughout most of the Arab world, then it follows that democratization and economic well-being would work against political and religious extremism. But so profound a change in the way things have been in the Arab world for so long is most unlikely to come soon or peacefully, if it comes at all. Historically, moreover, transition from autocracy to stable democracy has more often than not been protracted and violent; the road from the Magna Carta to the birth of the American republic took 561 years. So the potential policy payoff of a democratic and prosperous Middle East, if there is one, almost certainly lies in the very distant future.

(2) *Destroy or defeat other terrorist organizations of global reach, including the nexus of their regional and national analogs.* This objective essentially places the United States at war with all terrorist organizations, including those that have no beef with the United States. As such, this objective is both unattainable and strategically unwise. It is unattainable because of the sheer number and variety of terrorist organizations. It is strategically unwise because it creates unnecessary enemies at a time when the United States has more than enough to go around. As strategist Stephen Van Evera observes of the administration's response to the 9/11 attacks:

Defining it as a broad war on terrorism was a tremendous mistake. It should have been a war on Al Qaeda. Don't take your eye off the ball. Subordinate every other policy to it, including the policies toward Russia, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Iraq. Instead, the Administration defined it as a broad war on terror, including groups that have never taken a swing at the United States and never will. It leads to a loss of focus . . . .And you make enemies of the people you need against Al Qaeda.<sup>64</sup>

Insistence on moral clarity once again trumps strategic discrimination. Even if all terrorism is evil, most terrorist organizations do not threaten the United States. Many pursue local agendas that have little or no bearing on U.S. interests. Should the United States, in addition to fighting al-Qaeda, gratuitously pick fights with the Basque Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna (E.T.A. [Fatherland and Liberty]), the Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers, the Provisional Wing of the Irish Republican Army, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan,

Sendero Luminoso, Hamas, and Hizbollah? Do we want to provoke national- and regional-level terrorist organizations that have stayed out of America's way into targeting the U.S. interests and even the American homeland?

A cardinal rule of strategy is to keep your enemies to a manageable number. A strategy whose ambitions provoke the formation of an array of enemies whose defeat exceeds the resources available to that strategy is doomed to failure. The Germans were defeated in two world wars notwithstanding their superb performance at the operational and tactical levels of combat because their strategic ends outran their available means; their declared strategic ambitions provoked formation of an opposing coalition of states whose collective resources in the end overwhelmed those of Germany.

(3) *Delegitimize and ultimately eradicate the phenomenon of terrorism.* Most governments in the world today already regard terrorism as illegitimate. The problem is that there are countless millions of people around the world who are, or believe they are, oppressed and have no other recourse than irregular warfare, including terrorism, to oppose oppression. They do not regard terrorism as illegitimate. Indeed, they do not regard what they are doing as terrorism. "The difference between the revolutionary and the terrorist," Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yassir Arafat declared before the U.N. General Assembly in 1974, "lies in the reason for which he fights. For whoever stands by a just cause and fights for the freedom and liberation of his land from the invaders, the settlers and colonialists, cannot possibly be called a terrorist."<sup>65</sup> (Similarly, the recently executed anti-abortion terrorist Paul Hill denied that killing an abortionist was even an act of violence, much less terrorism. "I was totally justified in shooting the abortionist, because he was actually the one perpetrating the violence," he told Jessica Stern. "I would not characterize force being used to defend the unborn as violence."<sup>66</sup>)

Bruce Hoffman observes that "terrorists perceive themselves as reluctant warriors, driven by desperation--and lacking any viable alternative--to violence against a repressive state, a predatory rival ethnic or nationalist group, or an unresponsive international order."<sup>67</sup> For the Hamas suicide bomber, no Israeli is innocent; all



Israelis are enemies, and to blow them up in buses and discos is an heroic act of war against a hated oppressor. As long as irregular warfare, including terrorism, remains the only avenue of action open to the politically despondent and the militarily impotent, it will continue to be practiced regardless of how many governments view it as illegitimate. Terrorism can be a logical strategic choice for those who have no attractive alternatives.<sup>68</sup> It is well and good to counsel those with grievances to seek political solutions, but this is hardly useful advice if there is no political process available for doing so.

It should also be noted that the analogies of slavery and piracy are not encouraging. Both thrived for millennia before they finally came to be regarded by the civilized world as morally unacceptable, and pockets of both remain because they are still profitable enterprises in places where enforced national and international laws are absent.

The chief problem with this GWOT goal, however, is that terrorism is not a proper noun. Like guerrilla warfare, it is a *method* of violence, a *way* of waging war. How do you defeat a technique, as opposed to a flesh-and-blood enemy? You can kill terrorists, infiltrate their organizations, shut down their sources of cash, wipe out their training bases, and attack their state sponsors, but how do you attack a method? A generic war on terrorism "fails to make the distinction between the differing objectives of those who practice terrorism and the context surrounding its use," observes Robert Worley. "Failing to make the necessary distinctions invites a single, homogenous policy and strategy."<sup>69</sup> Again, one is reminded of the lack of threat discrimination that prompted U.S. intervention in the Vietnam War.

(4) *Transform Iraq into a prosperous, stable democracy.* The attainability of this objective remains to be seen. Experts on Iraq and the Arab world are divided on the issue of whether Iraq can be converted into a democracy, especially a democracy imposed by an outside Western power.<sup>70</sup> Few suggest that Arabs are culturally incapable of democracy. Monarchy and military rule have nonetheless been the norm, and pessimists cite, as a major obstacle to representative government in Iraq, the artificiality of the Iraqi state, cobbled together as it was by the British after World War I and encompassing antagonistic ethnic, religious, and tribal divisions. The most immediate obstacle to a successful democratic experiment

in Iraq is, of course, the failure--so far--of the Coalition Provisional Authority and U.S. occupation forces to provide the necessary foundation of public security and basic services. The rapidity and scope of the postwar collapse of public order in Iraq clearly surprised the administration, whose tardy and hasty planning for postwar Iraq stood in stark contrast to its meticulous planning for the war itself.<sup>71</sup> The administration did not anticipate the possibility that the forces it assembled to invade Iraq and destroy the Saddam Hussein regime would be insufficient to police Iraq once major military operations against the regime were completed. The result is continuing violence and insecurity.

Again, analogies to past experiences are misleading. Though the administration has repeatedly cited U.S. success in post-World War II Germany and Japan as evidence that the United States can do for Iraq what it did for those two former Axis Powers, the differences between 1945 and 2003 trample the similarities.<sup>72</sup> First of all, the United States entered postwar Japan and its occupation zone in Germany with overwhelming force, which precluded the eruption of local resistance. Second, both occupations were almost universally regarded as legitimate; Germany and Japan had plunged the world into war, and the victors of that war had the right and obligation to defeat and occupy them. Germany's and Japan's neighbors, victims of their aggression, wanted the United States and its allies in control. In the case of Japan, the Emperor himself legitimized Japan's unconditional surrender when he directly addressed the Japanese people over the radio, calling upon them to accept the end of the war, and he legitimized General Douglas MacArthur's authority by repeated public appearances with him. (There was not a single act of politically-motivated violence against American occupation forces during the 7 years of U.S. military governance in Japan.) In contrast, most of the world, including key friends and allies, opposed the U.S. war on Iraq, and it is fair to say that the U.S. occupation of Iraq fails the test of legitimacy in the eyes of an overwhelming number of Arabs.

Japanese society--ancient, homogenous, and conformist--was also completely different from that of Iraq, and both Germany and Japan, the former admittedly more so than the latter, had democratic antecedents in their political history. Additionally, the American role



in Germany and Japan was facilitated by German and Japanese fear of the Soviet Union; the United States served as a guarantee against a much worse fate than occupation by the Americans. Lastly, in the case of Japan, the United States governed a country completely surrounded by water that the United States could control (i.e., no porous land borders like Iraq) and that contained no mineral or other resources that outsiders sought to exploit (i.e., no oil like Iraq).

(5) *Transform the Middle East into a region of participatory self-government and economic opportunity.* Even assuming the United States can convert Iraq into a stable democracy (a huge assumption), it is not clear how a democratic Iraq gets us to a democratic Middle East. National Security Adviser Rice argues that, "Much as a democratic Germany became a linchpin of a new Europe that is today whole, free, and at peace, so a transformed Iraq can become a key element of a very different Middle East in which the ideologies of hate will not flourish."<sup>73</sup> Leaving aside the inherent perils of making analogies between the hypothetical future experience of Iraq and the Middle East and the past experience of Germany and Europe, the assumption seems to be that democracy is so catching that the establishment of just one big one in the Middle East will trigger a rush to emulate. The basis on which this democratic domino theory rests has never been explicated, however. Is it hope? Neo-conservative ideological conviction? How would democracy spread to the rest of the region?

The problem with this new domino theory is the same as the problem with the old one: it assumes that states and societies are essentially equal in vulnerability to the "threat" (i.e., democracy in the Middle East today, Communism in Southeast Asia in the 1960s). It ignores local circumstance, societal differences, separate national histories, and cultural asymmetries. It also ignores the prospect of those opposed to democracy using the democratic process to seize power, as did Hitler in Germany in 1933. "One man, one vote, one time." It was this very threat of Islamists using democracy to win power that provoked the suppression of budding democratic institutions in Algeria in the early 1990s. Indeed, fear of an Islamist electorate accounts in no small measure for the persistence of autocracy in Algeria, Egypt, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. Are U.S. strategic interests in the Muslim world really better served by hostile democracies than by friendly autocracies?

It is, in any event, not at all self-evident that anti-Western Islamist terrorism would cease or even significantly diminish with the emergence of friendly democracies and economic opportunity in the Middle East. Home-grown terrorism is certainly no stranger to the democratic West (the second deadliest terrorist attack in U.S. history was Timothy McVeigh's destruction of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, killing 168 people), and at least one study concludes that the incidence of nonstate terrorism is higher in free societies than in nonfree ones.<sup>74</sup> (Nonstate terrorism was notable for its absence in Saddam Hussein's Iraq.) Political extremism has a general though by no means exclusive association with the absence of democracy and economic opportunity, but with respect to individual terrorists and terrorist groups, there is no demonstrable cause and effect relationship. Left-wing terrorism in democratic Europe and the United States during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s attracted well-educated children of privilege; Osama bin Laden was born to great wealth; his chief lieutenant, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is a surgeon by profession; and most of the 9/11 attackers were educated and skilled. Moreover, for every politically and economically dispossessed Muslim who joins a terrorist organization there are tens of thousands who do not, although they may sympathize with the terrorists' goals. Additionally, whereas satisfaction of political and economic grievances might assuage Arab terrorism conducted on behalf of clear political goals (e.g., Palestinian terrorism directed toward the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state), satisfaction of said grievances would probably do little or nothing to mollify Islamist extremist organizations motivated by religious ideology.<sup>75</sup> For example, Osama bin Laden's professed goal of doing away with the very institution of the state in the Muslim world and replacing it with a revived and fundamentalist caliphate governing all Muslims is simply beyond political satisfaction.

None of this is to argue that the likes of al-Qaeda will be perpetual threats. Persistent and successful counterterrorist operations could deter an increasing number of potential recruits from joining by simply advertising the grave personal risk involved. At some point, moreover, al-Qaeda's failure to remake the Muslim world will become manifest to a growing number of its sympathizers. "As the United States improves its counter-terrorist performance, so a

sense of futility should discourage both the candidate martyrs and their commanders,” argues Colin S. Gray. “It is one thing to die to advance a cause. It is quite another to die in an operation that will both probably fail tactically, and serve no obvious strategic, albeit apocalyptic, goal.”<sup>76</sup> A counterterrorist strategy, moreover, that approaches al-Qaeda not as a lone organization, but rather as a system containing numerous components, some undeterrable but others deterrable, is likely to have a significant payoff over time. A RAND study published in 2002 concluded:

It is a mistake to think of influencing al Qaeda as though it were a single entity; rather, the targets of U.S. influence are the many elements of the al Qaeda *system*, which comprises leaders, lieutenants, financiers, logisticians and other facilitators, foot soldiers, recruiters, supporting population segments, and religious or otherwise ideological figures. A particular leader may not be easily deterrable, but other elements of the system (e.g., state supporters or wealthy financiers living the good life while supporting al Qaeda in the shadows) may be.<sup>77</sup>

(6) *Halt, by force if necessary, the continued proliferation of WMD and their means of delivery to hostile and potentially hostile states and other entities.* The main feasibility issue with respect to this goal is whether the United States can, via threatened preventive military action, deter rogue states from pursuing the acquisition of nuclear weapons and, failing that, whether it can militarily deprive such states of the means of doing so. There is no evidence that successful deterrence of the *use* of nuclear weapons in wartime can be extended to their *acquisition* in peacetime. On the contrary, threatened preventive war may actually encourage proliferation. Moreover, considerable disagreement surrounds the potential effectiveness of proposed new nuclear weapons designed to destroy subterranean nuclear weapons facilities. In any event, the development and certainly the use of such weapons could in the long run prove catastrophically counterproductive to the goal of halting proliferation by undermining or demolishing the NPT regime and the now universally respected moratorium on nuclear weapons testing.

Can the United States deter, via implicit or explicit threat of preventive war, rogue state acquisition of nuclear weapons? The

question is difficult to answer because the declared U.S. policy of “anticipatory self-defense” is so new and because the deterrent effects, if any, on other rogue states of the U.S. preventive war against Iraq are not yet evident. There are certainly those who believed that Operation IRAQI FREEDOM would send a chilling message to Teheran, Pyongyang, and other rogue state capitals. The prominent neo-conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer, for example, believed that removing Saddam Hussein would provide “a clear demonstration to other tyrants that to acquire WMD is a losing proposition. Not only do they not purchase you immunity [from U.S. attack] (as in classical deterrence). . . they purchase you extinction.”<sup>78</sup> Preventive war, though a substitute for deterrence, would actually reinforce deterrence.

In fact, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM appears, at least so far, to have had the opposite effect on North Korea and Iran. Even before the war, North Korea, perhaps in response to having been declared an “evil” state and in anticipation of being second on the U.S. attack list after Iraq, announced that it was accelerating its nuclear weapons program. Iran also revealed a potential nuclear program more advanced than most suspected. Neither state seemed in the least bit deterred, although North Korea, under considerable pressure from China, finally entered into multilateral negotiations with as yet unknown results. The administration, however, did not take or even speak of military action against these states in part because of preoccupation with Iraq and in part because military action against Iran, and especially North Korea, would entail far greater difficulties and risks than action against Iraq. Iran is much larger and poses a much greater terrorist threat than Iraq, and Iran’s location and terrain are logistically and operationally much more forbidding. North Korea is believed to have nuclear weapons capacity and holds Seoul hostage to thousands of forward-deployed long-range artillery pieces.

All of this suggests that the value of threatened or actual preventive military action may be limited to target states, like Iraq, that are incapable of either offering effective military resistance or placing at risk assets highly valued by the United States and its allies. States capable of doing so may indeed be *detering the United States* rather than being deterred. “What North Korea shows is that

deterrence is working,” observed Joseph S. Nye, Jr., in January 2003. “The only problem is that we are the ones being deterred.”<sup>79</sup> Iraq, though dwarfed by North Korea as a proliferator and by Iran as a sponsor of terrorism, was selected because it was a military pushover. According to Robin Cook, the former British Foreign Minister who resigned over the decision to go to war with Iraq, “The truth is that the US chose to attack Iraq not because it posed a threat but because the US knew Iraq was weak and expected its military to collapse.”<sup>80</sup> In any event, the very facts of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and its unexpectedly burdensome aftermath severely constrain U.S. military resources for a second preventive war any time soon.

But what about “surgical” strikes targeted not at the rogue state regime but its nuclear facilities instead? Given suspected rogue-state burial of much of their nuclear weapons programs underground, such strikes probably would require earth-penetrating weapons armed with low-yield nuclear warheads of the kind whose development was reportedly recommended by an administration review of U.S. nuclear posture.<sup>81</sup> Both the effectiveness and wisdom of such weapons, however, have been strongly questioned.<sup>82</sup> Scientists are split on whether weapons can be developed that could do the job without excessive collateral damage, and defenders of the nuclear arms control status quo fear that for the United States, which ceased production of nuclear weapons over a decade ago, to initiate the development and testing of such a new category of nuclear weapons would undermine both the NPT regime and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which all nuclear powers have observed since 1998, and blur the critical distinction between nuclear and conventional weapons. Opponents of new “mininukes,” such as Joseph Cirincione, former nuclear arms control negotiator and now Director of the Carnegie Endowment’s Non-Proliferation Project, also point out that their actual use “would cross a threshold that has not been breached since the Truman administration. That in turn would encourage other nations to develop and use nuclear weapons in a similar manner. That’s not in the United States’ national security interests.”<sup>83</sup> Finally, there is the unavoidable and overriding political question: Would any American president actually launch a nuclear attack on a non-nuclear, non-Western state with which it was not at war?

In short, threatened or actual preventive military action seems an inherently dangerous and potentially very counter-productive means to achieve the goal of halting the continued proliferation of WMD, which itself may simply exceed the limits of American power.

To sum up the realism of the GWOT's six objectives, destroying al-Qaeda, or at least reducing it to a significantly lesser threat, and transforming Iraq into a stable democracy certainly are not inherently unrealistic goals. Terrorist organizations can and have been defeated, although al-Qaeda is much more than an organization, and there is an impressive history of movement from autocracy to democracy, although the road from one to the other can be protracted, unstable, and violent. American competence and staying power will be keys to achieving both goals, and while these attributes have been on display in the fight against al-Qaeda, they are open questions in postwar Iraq. The United States has simply not invested the resources--troops (of the right kind), money, expertise--necessary to provide the basic security and material foundations for a successful political transformation. Failure to accept the costs and challenges of nation-building in Iraq would make the goal of transforming Iraq into a stable democracy unrealistic, and by extension the goal of politically transforming the Middle East. This larger objective may simply be beyond the power of any outside force to accomplish, but the reasoning behind the GWOT as defined by the Bush administration is that a Middle East transformation is possible but only via the triggering domino of an established democracy in Iraq. Thus the Middle East will remain a political mess if the United States messes up its opportunities in postwar Iraq.

Clearly in the inherently unrealistic category, for reasons already discussed, are the goals of destroying all terrorist organizations of global reach, including the nexus of their regional and national analogs, and terrorism itself. These goals not only lie beyond America's means to achieve them, but also gratuitously pit the United States against "enemies" that have not threatened U.S. interests.

The goal of preventing rogue states from acquiring WMD, especially nuclear weapons, may be achievable but only at the risk of dangerous military action and even war. Paradoxically, explicit U.S. embrace of a forward-leaning doctrine of "anticipatory self-defense"



followed by invasion of Iraq may inflate the very threat that is the focus of U.S. policy. It is a mistake to assume that rogue states seek nuclear weapons *solely* for purposes of blackmail and aggression. Rogue states want such weapons for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is self-protection against enemies also armed or seeking to arm themselves with nuclear weapons. The United States is the greatest of those enemies. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that rogue states view acquisition of nuclear weapons as a deterrent to U.S. military attack on them or at a very minimum as a means of raising the price of an American attack. Take Iran for an example. Iranian interest in nuclear weapons began under the Shah and was stimulated by having a hostile nuclear superpower (the Soviet Union) to the north, an aspiring hostile nuclear power (Iraq) to the west, and yet another nuclear aspirant (Pakistan) to the east. Throw in a nuclear-armed Israel and a history of violence, instability, and war in the region, and later, a U.S. declaration of Iran as “evil,” and you get a perfectly understandable explanation for Iran’s nuclear ambitions.

The issue boils down to a choice of ends and means. If mere rogue state *possession* of nuclear weapons is deemed an unacceptable threat, then *preventive war* may be the only recourse. If, on the other hand, the threat is defined as rogue state *use* of nuclear weapons, then *deterrence* becomes the preferred means. Because preventing rogue state acquisition of nuclear weapons is a much more difficult and risky challenge than deterring rogue state use of such weapons, and because there is no persuasive evidence that rogue states (as opposed to terrorists) are undeterrable, the question arises of whether it would be wiser to replace the goal of prevention with that of deterrence.

## **THE GWOT: SUSTAINABILITY**

The political, fiscal, and military sustainability of the GWOT remains to be seen. There is general agreement that the GWOT will be a protracted and costly undertaking. Additionally, the conflation of rogue states and terrorism as an undifferentiated threat steered the GWOT into an invasion and occupation of Iraq and in so doing converted that country into a magnet for jihadists seeking to kill

and destroy “crusader” targets. The administration did not expect to encounter irregular warfare in Iraq, much less sustained irregular warfare directed against not only U.S. troops but also friendly Iraqis, reconstruction targets, and even United Nations personnel. What started out as a short conventional war of choice has become an open-ended unconventional war of necessity. Yet by invading and occupying Iraq, the United States assumed responsibility for its future and therefore has no moral or strategic choice but to restore security and establish a functioning economy and stable government. Historians will debate the wisdom of attacking Iraq. But the issue for the United States now is whether it can and will deliver on its promises for Iraq’s future. Walking away would be catastrophic. Michael Ignatieff observes:

The foreign fighters who have crossed into Iraq from Syria, Iran and Palestine to join Hussein loyalists in attacks on American soldiers know how much is at stake. Bloodying American troops, forcing a precipitate withdrawal, destroying the chances for a democratic Iraq would inflict the biggest defeat on America since Vietnam and send a message to every Islamic extremist in the region: Goliath is vulnerable.<sup>84</sup>

## **Political.**

That said, neither nation-building nor political stamina in protracted conflicts with irregular enemies has been a hallmark of American statecraft since the 1960s. Indeed, the “primary problem at the core of American deficiencies in post-conflict capabilities, resources, and commitment is a national aversion to nation-building, which was strengthened by failure in Vietnam,” concluded a widely-read U.S. Army study on reconstructing Iraq published the month before Operation IRAQI FREEDOM was launched.<sup>85</sup> The study went on to predict and warn:

If the war is rapid with few casualties, the occupation will probably be characterized by an initial honeymoon period during which the United States will reap the benefits of ridding the population of a brutal dictator. Nevertheless, most Iraqis and most other Arabs will probably assume that the United States intervened in Iraq for its own reasons and not to liberate the population.



Long-term gratitude is unlikely and suspicion of U.S. motives will increase as the occupation continues. A force initially viewed as liberators can rapidly be relegated to the status of invaders should an unwelcome occupation continue for a prolonged time. Occupation problems may be especially acute if the United States must implement the bulk of the occupation itself rather than turn these duties over to a postwar international force.<sup>86</sup>

The study did not predict the emergence and persistence of irregular warfare or the administration's inadequate preparation for the situation as it unfolded in Iraq after May 1, 2003, the day the President declared the end of major combat operations in Iraq. By late August the number of U.S. troops killed in Iraq surpassed the number lost before May 1, and some critics maintained that there was still insufficient force of the right kind on the ground in Iraq to provide the security necessary to permit Iraq's economic and political reconstruction. (Defense Department spokesmen denied charges of force insufficiency.) The situation elicited comparisons with U.S. intervention in Lebanon in 1982-84<sup>87</sup> as well as calls from Capitol Hill on both sides of the aisle for the commitment of more money and manpower.<sup>88</sup>

If the U.S. effort in Iraq is viewed as a component in the GWOT (President Bush, in his September 7, 2003 address to the nation called Iraq "the central front" of the GWOT<sup>89</sup>), then it is certainly the largest component in terms of monetary cost, military manpower committed, and strategic risk. The sustainability of the GWOT therefore hinges very significantly on the sustainability of present U.S. policy in Iraq. Will the American people and their elected representatives go the distance in Iraq?

The absence of significant international participation (Great Britain excepted) in dealing with the challenges of postwar Iraq has compelled the United States to shoulder the brunt of the blood and treasure costs. (As of late summer 2003, about 185,000 U.S. troops were deployed in Iraq and Kuwait. Aside from the U.S. and the British deployment, the international coalition's other 29 countries, none of them militarily significant, contributed a total of 12,000 soldiers, or an average of about 430 troops per national contingent.<sup>90</sup>) This situation is likely to continue as long as the U.S. Government is unwilling to share political and military authority over Iraq's future

with the United Nations or some other international consortium. U.S. troop losses in Iraq since May 1 averaged about one dead per day, and by the end of August the number of U.S. wounded was approaching 10 per day.<sup>91</sup> Losses rose thereafter, however, as insurgent attacks grew in number and sophistication; during the month of November, 79 U.S. troops were killed in Iraq--more than in either of the two months of "major combat operations."<sup>92</sup>

The dollar cost of maintaining U.S. forces in Iraq is currently running at \$4 billion per month, or an annual rate of \$48 billion. In early September 2003 the White House informed congressional leaders that it was preparing a new budget request of \$60-70 billion to cover mounting military and reconstruction costs in Iraq.<sup>93</sup> The President shortly thereafter announced an \$87-billion request to cover Iraq and continuing U.S. costs in Afghanistan.<sup>94</sup> Less than a week later, Secretary Rumsfeld reportedly informed U.S. senators that Iraq's postwar reconstruction costs were likely to run another \$35 billion above and beyond those contained in the announced \$87 billion.<sup>95</sup> These moves followed an earlier appropriation of \$79 billion to cover the costs of the war and its immediate aftermath. Both troop losses and dollar costs could rise or fall depending upon changes in the security situation, U.S. policy, and the willingness of the international community to shoulder greater responsibility for Iraq's future. An early September 2003 assessment provided by the *Wall Street Journal* predicted further spirals in projected postwar Iraq costs attributable to gross overestimation of near-term Iraqi oil revenues; surprise at the decrepit state of Iraq's basic infrastructure; extensive and continuing looting; sabotage of oil pipelines, electrical power lines, and other key reconstruction targets; downstream costs of financing expanding Iraqi government and security forces; and poor prospects for significant international donor support.<sup>96</sup>

At this juncture, 7 months after major combat operations were declared over, and notwithstanding continued U.S. military casualties, failure to discover any Iraqi WMD, and unexpectedly high occupation and reconstruction costs, public and congressional majorities continue to support the Bush administration's objectives in Iraq. Americans don't like to cut and run, especially when their soldiers are taking fire. Public support for the war itself remains strong, in part because most Americans are convinced that the Iraqi

WMD threat was real and that removing Saddam Hussein from power was integral to the war on terrorism. (A September 2003 *Washington Post* poll revealed that 69 percent of those polled believed that it was “at least likely that Saddam Hussein was involved” in the 9/11 attacks.<sup>97</sup>) There is also a sense that the United States simply cannot afford to fail in Iraq: too much political and military capital has been invested in this very controversial enterprise and there are too many foreign critics itching to say, “We told you so!”

There is certainly no evidence of intolerance of U.S. casualties at the rates that have been incurred so far. Elite civilian and military opinion has, in any event, tended to overestimate public sensitivity to incurring casualties; most Americans are willing to tolerate substantial casualties if they believe in the cause for which they are incurred and see visible policy progress.<sup>98</sup> The problem, at least before 9/11, was casualty phobia among the political and military elites, which produced a series of timid U.S. military interventions in Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan, only one of which committed U.S. ground forces to possible combat.<sup>99</sup> But the interventions of the 1990s were wars of choice; most Americans continue to regard the war against Iraq as a war of necessity, and therefore worth much greater risk in blood and treasure.

By late summer of 2003, however, there were signs of growing public dissatisfaction with the way things were going in Iraq. Two polls taken in late August suggested the disappearance of any expectations of an easy or cheap end-game in that country. A *USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup* poll found that 63 percent of Americans still believed the war was worth fighting, but 54 percent also believed that the administration “did not have a clear plan to bring stability and democracy to the country.” Respondents were almost evenly split over whether to “maintain current or increase U.S. force levels” in Iraq (51 percent) or “to cut or completely withdraw U.S. forces” (46 percent).<sup>100</sup> A *Newsweek* poll found that 69 percent of Americans were “very concerned” (40 percent) or “somewhat concerned” (29 percent) that the United States would be “bogged down for many years in Iraq without making much progress in achieving its goals.” Nearly half—47 percent—said they were “very concerned” that the cost of maintaining U.S. forces in Iraq would lead to “a large budget deficit and seriously hurt the economy.” Sixty percent of those

polled said that the estimated occupation cost of \$1 billion per week was too high and believed it should be reduced. Only 15 percent said they would support the current level of occupation costs for 3 years or more.<sup>101</sup> A subsequent *Washington Post*-ABC News poll found that 60 percent of all respondents did not support the President's request for an additional \$87 billion for U.S. military and civil operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>102</sup> A late October, *Washington Post*-ABC poll revealed, for the first time, that a majority--51%--of Americans disapproved of the way the administration was handling Iraq.<sup>103</sup>

## **Fiscal.**

The Iraq-deficit-economy connection could turn out to be a powerful influence on public and congressional attitudes. Even without Iraq costs, which so far have been financed by off-budget requests, federal deficits are expected to balloon government debt over the next decade. In August 2003 the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projected a \$480 billion deficit for fiscal year 2004 and a total cumulative deficit for the decade of 2004-13 of \$1.40 trillion.<sup>104</sup> These numbers minimize the problem, however, because the CBO is legally required to base its projections only on existing laws. Thus, the CBO projection assumes the scheduled expiration of the huge 2001 and 2003 tax cuts, although most observers believe they will be extended. (Both the White House and the Republican congressional leadership favor making the cuts permanent.) The CBO projection also predated the passage of Medicare prescription drug benefit legislation and ignored likely passage of the reformed alternative minimum tax legislation. Altogether, these three measures could, according to a *Washington Post* budget analysis, add an estimated \$1.93 trillion to the total 2004-13 deficit.<sup>105</sup> The CBO also assumed that discretionary spending will grow only at the rate of inflation, projected to average 2.7 percent during the next decade, when in fact it has risen by an annual 7.7 percent over the past 5 years. Growth at the latter rate would add another estimated \$1.39 trillion.<sup>106</sup> According to the *Washington Post* analysis, the sum of all these additions, plus the additional interest on the debt, could produce an estimated total 2004-13 deficit of \$4.33 trillion,<sup>107</sup> or almost four times larger than the CBO projection. An assessment performed by

the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities projected an even greater deficit, \$5.1 trillion.<sup>108</sup>

To be sure, these figures are estimates, and estimates are very assumption dependent. But they convey the magnitude of the federal fiscal crisis that lies ahead if the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts are not rescinded, if minimum tax reform legislation is passed, and if discretionary spending runs significantly above the inflation rate. These estimates, moreover, do not include U.S. military costs in Iraq beyond fiscal year 2004 or the possible costs of a larger U.S. Army dictated by the impact of Iraq on that service's ability to meet its obligations worldwide. Fiscally, something's got to give in the coming years, and that something may well be a reduction of U.S. ambitions in Iraq. Such a reduction would be especially likely if more and more Americans come to see a cause and effect relationship between outlays for Iraq, spiraling federal deficits, and bad economic news at home (such as sharply rising interest rates).

## **Military.**

The GWOT's fiscal sustainability is inseparable from its military sustainability. Unanticipated U.S. ground force requirements in postwar Iraq have stressed the U.S. Army to the breaking point (see discussion below). As it approached war with Iraq, the administration assumed a "liberation" scenario in which it would inherit a post-Saddam Iraq with functioning government ministries and police and other security forces; it anticipated neither the government's abrupt disintegration nor the emergence of irregular warfare against U.S. forces.<sup>109</sup> The Pentagon reportedly had planned to withdraw most U.S. forces from Iraq by the fall of 2003. Anticipating a permissive security environment and major occupation force contributions from allies, it planned, within 6 months following cessation of major military operations, to cut U.S. force strength in Iraq to no more than 70,000 and as little as 30,000.<sup>110</sup>

But by mid-May 2003 the security situation in Iraq compelled the Defense Department to suspend planned withdrawals, leaving in place an occupation force of about 150,000.<sup>111</sup> In July the Pentagon unveiled a plan that assumed a U.S. force presence in Iraq of 156,000 well into 2004, and U.S. Army planners, to sustain that service's

rotation base for Iraq, also increased most overseas deployments from 6-month to year-long tours of duty and activated at least two National Guard brigades.<sup>112</sup> Clearly, unanticipated commitments in postwar Iraq had stretched the Army to the point where it had little in reserve for any other contingencies that might arise (e.g., a war in Korea). Indeed, the Army appeared incapable of sustaining a commitment of 16 of its 33 active-duty combat brigades in Iraq absent a reduction in commitments elsewhere or an expansion of its force structure.

As of the fall of 2003, the Army had about 185,000 troops (one-third of the army's active-duty end-strength) deployed in and around Iraq, another 10,000 in Afghanistan, plus an additional 25,000 in South Korea and 5,000 in the Balkans. Altogether, some 370,000 U.S. Army active and reserve component troops were deployed overseas, or more than one-third of that service's total active-reserve force of just over one million. If the Iraqi deployment is significantly reinforced to provide additional order and stability for reconstruction,<sup>112</sup> some critics believe this will threaten the army's ability to provide a rotation base for its overseas deployments and strip it of a strategic reserve for contingencies elsewhere.<sup>113</sup>

A September 2003 assessment by the CBO concluded that the "Army does not have enough active-duty component forces to simultaneously maintain the [Iraqi] occupation at its current size, limit deployments to one year, and sustain all of its other commitments." According to the study, mobilization of additional National Guard and Reserve units provided the only way the United States could sustain current Army force levels in and around Iraq beyond March 2004;<sup>116</sup> unless, of course, the occupation is genuinely internationalized, with major foreign troop contingents permitting a significantly reduced U.S. force presence in Iraq. The administration was clearly moving in this direction by early September. The White House, after months of resisting a greater U.N. role in postwar Iraq, and reportedly at the insistence of the State Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff as well as key congressional leaders,<sup>117</sup> authorized circulation of a draft U.N. Security Council resolution calling for creation of a U.N.-authorized, U.S.-led multinational force to secure Iraq.<sup>118</sup>

In sum, the GWOT's political, fiscal, and military sustainability



is an open question. There are clearly lurking threats to its fiscal and its military sustainability, which in turn could threaten its political sustainability. The key is the future of the security situation and U.S. policy in Iraq, which the administration has made the centerpiece of the global war on terrorism. Little doubt remains about the sustainability of the relatively inexpensive war of necessity against al-Qaeda. The issue is the sustainability of the war of choice against Iraq and its aftermath.

## BOUNDING THE GWOT

The central conclusion of this study is that *the global war on terrorism as currently defined and waged is dangerously indiscriminate and ambitious, and accordingly that its parameters should be readjusted to conform to concrete U.S. security interests and the limits of American power*. Such a readjustment requires movement from unrealistic to realistic war aims and from unnecessarily provocative to traditional uses of military force. Specifically, a realistically bounded GWOT requires the following measures:

(1) *Deconflate the threat*. This means, in both thought and policy, treating rogue states separately from terrorist organizations, and separating terrorist organizations at war with the United States from those that are not. Approaching rogue states and terrorist organizations as an undifferentiated threat ignores critical differences in character, threat level, and vulnerability to U.S. military action. Al-Qaeda is an undeterrable transnational organization in a war with the United States that has claimed the lives of thousands of Americans. North Korea is a (so far) deterrable (and destroyable) state that is not in a hot war with the United States. Similarly, lumping together all terrorist organizations into a generic threat of terrorism gratuitously makes the United States an enemy of groups that do not threaten U.S. security interests. Terrorism may be a horrendous means to any end, but do the Basque E.T.A. and the Tamil Tigers really threaten the United States? Strategy involves choice within a framework of scarce resources; as such, it requires threat discrimination and prioritization of effort.

(2) *Substitute credible deterrence for preventive war as the primary policy for dealing with rogue states seeking to acquire WMD*. This means



shifting the focus of U.S. policy from rogue state acquisition of WMD to rogue state use of WMD. There is no evidence that rogue state use of WMD is undeterrable via credible threats of unacceptable retaliation or that rogue states seek WMD solely for purposes of blackmail and aggression. There is evidence, however, of failed deterrence of rogue state acquisition of WMD; indeed, there is evidence that a declared policy of preventive war encourages acquisition. Preventive war in any case alienates friends and allies, leaving the United States isolated and unnecessarily burdened (as in Iraq). A policy of first reliance on deterrence moreover does not foreclose the option of preemption; striking first is an inherent policy option in any crisis, and preemption, as opposed to preventive war, has legal sanction under strict criteria. Colin Gray persuasively argues against making preventive war “*the* master strategic idea for [the post-9/11 era]” because its “demands on America’s political, intelligence, and military resources are too exacting.” The United States:

has no practical choice other than to make of deterrence all that it can be. . . . If this view is rejected, the grim implication is that the United States, as the sheriff of world order, will require heroic performances from those policy instruments charged with cutting-edge duties on behalf of preemptive or preventive operations. Preemption or prevention have their obvious attractions as contrasted with deterrence, at least when they work. But they carry the risk of encouraging a hopeless quest for total security.<sup>119</sup>

Dr. Condoleezza Rice got it right in 2000: “[T]he first line of defense [in dealing with rogue states] should be a clear and classical statement of deterrence—if they do acquire WMD, their weapons will be unusable because any attempt to use them will bring national obliteration.”<sup>120</sup>

(3) *Refocus the GWOT first and foremost on al-Qaeda, its allies, and homeland security.* This may be difficult, given the current preoccupation with Iraq. But it was, after all, al-Qaeda, not a rogue state, that conducted the 9/11 attacks, and it is al-Qaeda, not a rogue state, that continues to conduct terrorist attacks against U.S. and Western interests worldwide. The war against Iraq was a detour

from, not an integral component of, the war on terrorism; in fact, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM may have expanded the terrorist threat by establishing a large new American target set in an Arab heartland. The unexpectedly large costs incurred by Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and its continuing aftermath probably will not affect funding of the relatively cheap counterterrorist campaign against al-Qaeda. But those costs most assuredly impede funding of woefully underfunded homeland security requirements.

Indeed, homeland security is probably the greatest GWOT opportunity cost of the war against Iraq. Consider, for example, the approximately \$150 billion already authorized or requested to cover the war and postwar costs (with no end in sight). This figure exceeds by over \$50 billion the estimated \$98.4 billion shortfall in federal funding of emergency response agencies in the United States over the next 5 years. The estimate is the product of an independent task force study sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations and completed in the summer of 2003. The study, entitled *Emergency Responders: Drastically Underfunded, Dangerously Unprepared*, concluded that almost two years after 9/11, "the United States remains dangerously ill-prepared to handle a catastrophic attack on American soil" because of, among other things, acute shortages of radios among firefighters, WMD protective gear for police departments, basic equipment and expertise in public health laboratories, and hazardous materials detection equipment in most cities."<sup>121</sup> And emergency responders constitute just one of dozens of underfunded homeland security components.

(4) *Seek rogue-state regime change via measures short of war.* Forcible regime change of the kind undertaken in Iraq is an enterprise fraught with unexpected costs and unintended consequences. Even if destroying the old regime entails little military risk, as was the case in Iraq, the task of creating a new regime can be costly, protracted, and strategically exhausting. Indeed, it is probably fair to say that the combination of U.S. preoccupation in postwar Iraq and the more formidable resistance a U.S. attack on Iran or North Korea almost certainly would encounter effectively removes both of those states as realistic targets of forcible regime change. The United States has in any event considerable experience in engineering regime change by measures short of war (e.g., covert action); and even absent regime

change there are means, such as coercive diplomacy and trade/aid concessions, for altering undesirable regime behavior. Additionally, even the most hostile regimes can change over time. Gorbachev's Russia would have been unrecognizable to Stalin's, as would Jiang Zemin's China to Mao's.

(5) *Be prepared to settle for stability rather than democracy in Iraq, and international rather than U.S. responsibility for Iraq.* The United States may be compelled to lower its political expectations in Iraq and by extension the Middle East. Establishing democracy in Iraq is clearly a desirable objective, and the United States should do whatever it can to accomplish that goal. But if the road to democracy proves chaotic and violent or if it is seen to presage the establishment of a theocracy via "one man, one vote, one time," the United States might have to settle for stability in the form of a friendly autocracy of the kind with which it enjoys working relationships in Cairo, Riyadh, and Islamabad. This is certainly not the preferred choice, but it may turn out to be the only one consistent with at least the overriding near-term U.S. security interest of stability. Similarly, the United States may have to accept a genuine internationalization of its position in Iraq. A UN-authorized multinational force encompassing contingents from major states that opposed the U.S. war against Iraq would both legitimize the American presence in Iraq as well as share the blood and treasure burden of occupation/reconstruction, which the United States is bearing almost single-handedly.

(6) *Reassess U.S. force levels, especially ground force levels.* Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and its aftermath argue strongly for an across-the-board reassessment of U.S. force levels. Though defense transformation stresses (among other things) substitution of technology for manpower, postwar tasks of pacification and nation-building are inherently manpower-intensive. Indeed, defense transformation may be counterproductive to the tasks that face the United States in Iraq and potentially in other states the United States may choose to subdue and attempt to recreate. Frederick A. Kagan argues that the reason why "the United States [has] been so successful in recent wars [but] encountered so much difficulty in securing its political aims after the shooting stopped" lies partly in "a vision of war" that "see[s] the enemy as a target set and believe[s] that when all or most of the targets have been hit, he will inevitably

surrender and American goals will be achieved.” This vision ignores the importance of “how, exactly, one defeats the enemy and what the enemy’s country looks like at the moment the bullets stop flying.”<sup>122</sup> For Kagan, the “entire thrust of the current program of military transformation of the U.S. armed forces . . . aims at the implementation and perfection of this sort of target-set mentality.”<sup>123</sup> More to the point:

If the most difficult task facing a state that desires to change the regime in another state is securing the support of the defeated populace for the new government, then the armed forces of that state must do more than break things and kill people. They must secure critical population centers and state infrastructure. They have to maintain order and prevent the development of humanitarian catastrophes likely to undermine American efforts to establish a stable new regime.<sup>124</sup>

These tasks require not only many “boots on the ground” for long periods of time, but also recognition that:

If the U.S. is to undertake wars that aim at regime change and maintain its current critical role in controlling and directing world affairs, then it must fundamentally change its views of war. It is not enough to consider simply how to pound the enemy into submission with stand-off forces. War plans must also consider how to make the transition from that defeated government to a new one. A doctrine based on the notion that superpowers don’t do windows will fail in this task. Regime change is inextricably intertwined with nation-building and peacekeeping. Those elements must be factored into any such plan from the outset. . . .

To effect regime change, U.S. forces must be positively in control of the enemy’s territory and population as rapidly and continuously as possible. That control cannot be achieved by machines, still less by bombs. Only human beings interacting with other human beings can achieve it. The only hope for success in the extension of politics that is war is to restore the human element to the transformation equation.<sup>125</sup>

Americans have historically displayed a view of war as a substitute for politics, and the U.S. military has seemed congenitally

averse to performing operations other than war. But the Kagan thesis does underscore the importance of not quantitatively disinvesting in ground forces for the sake of a transformational vision. Indeed, under present and foreseeable circumstances the possibility of increasing ground force end-strengths should be examined.

The global war on terrorism as presently defined and conducted is strategically unfocused, promises much more than it can deliver, and threatens to dissipate U.S. military and other resources in an endless and hopeless search for absolute security. The United States may be able to defeat, even destroy, al-Qaeda, but it cannot rid the world of terrorism, much less evil.

## ENDNOTES

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The fifth (North Korea) has been twice caught cheating and has now entered negotiations. Additionally, the United States has successfully encouraged several states (Argentina, Brazil, South Korea, and Taiwan) to cease work on suspected nuclear weapons programs and other states (Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine) to give up nuclear weapons they inherited from the Soviet Union. The United States has also extended nuclear deterrence to such key allies as Germany and Japan that might otherwise have felt compelled to develop their own arsenals.

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