

## THE WAR ON TERROR, 2001-PRESENT

### I. ORIGINS OF AL QAEDA: WAR CAUSES WAR

Al Qaeda emerged in the late 1980s from the brew of the Soviet War in Afghanistan (1979-89) and the following Afghan civil war (1989-1996).

#### A. The Soviet-Afghan war, 1979-89.

1. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, partly to prevent it from sliding into the U.S. camp in the Cold War, partly to forestall the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. The Afghans resisted (with U.S. help, see 'B'); the Soviets responded brutally, killing one million Afghans and creating five million Afghan refugees, 1979-1989.
2. The U.S. sent large covert aid to the Afghan anti-Soviet resistance, 1980-1989. At Pakistani urging U.S. aid flowed mainly to the most extreme Islamists among the seven mujahideen groups resisting the Soviets, especially to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's vicious Hisb-e-Islami group.

Osama Bin Laden formed Al Qaeda in Pakistan in 1988 from Arabs who volunteered to aid the Afghans. Al Qaeda combined Egyptian followers of Egyptian Islamist ideas (Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb) with Saudi followers of Wahhabism, a hateful and xenophobic Saudi Islamic sect. Bin Laden's first target: the Soviet Union. His second target: the United States. His prime objective: to achieve the overthrow of secular and/or corrupt Arab regimes in Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. He believed that the U.S. propped up these regimes; ending U.S. support for them would ease their downfall.

3. The Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in February 1989 but the U.S. continued to support violent resistance to the Najibullah communist regime it left behind. Najibullah fell in 1992.

#### B. The Afghan Civil War, 1989-1996.

1. The U.S. walked away from Afghanistan after Najibullah's fall, making no effort to establish peace among the fractious mujahideen factions that overthrew Najibullah. These factions fell to fighting each other, 1992-1996, destroying much of what remained of Afghanistan. At one point Hekmatyar's bunch, annoyed at being out of power, shelled Kabul, destroying half the city.

#### C. The India-Pakistan conflict.

1. To avoid being caught in a two-front war with India and a pro-India Afghanistan, elements of the Pakistani intelligence service (ISI) created the Taliban to serve as their instrument of influence in Afghanistan and pushed it to dominance in Afghanistan in 1996. Some Afghans (the Northern Alliance) continued to resist Taliban rule. But the Afghan people generally welcomed the Taliban as the only answer to continued chaos.

The Taliban ruled Afghanistan with great cruelty during 1996-2001. It also allowed Bin Laden's Al Qaeda to enter Afghanistan and set up training bases in exchange for its military help against the Northern Alliance. Al Qaeda trained 20,000 fighters in these camps, then scattered them to the four corners of the world to conduct murder and mayhem against "infidels."

#### D. Al-Qaeda terror.

1. Al Qaeda and its affiliates commenced a violent campaign of terror against the U.S. in the 1990s. Ramzy Youssef, a nephew of Al Qaeda leader Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, organized the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center and a 1994 failed attempt to destroy 11 airliners over the Pacific ocean. Al Qaeda then organized the August 1998 bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 212 Africans and 12 Americans; a failed January 1, 2000 attack on the Los Angeles airport and hotels in Jordan; the October 2000 bombing of the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen; and the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. The U.S. struck back at Al Qaeda's Afghan bases with cruise missiles in August 1998 and finally moved to oust the Afghan Taliban regime that protected it in October 2001. Most of the Al Qaeda leadership survived the Taliban's ouster by slipping into Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Provinces, where many still remain.

#### E. Background factors contributing to the rise of Al Qaeda and to the danger

it poses:

- Three wars (just discussed).
- Failed states that cannot control their territory, such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Congo, and Lebanon (from 1970s-1980s) have grown in number. This has given terrorist groups places to locate. Al Qaeda now hides in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Somalia.
- The rise of a violent Islamist ideology--the "jihadi" or "harabi" worldview, propounded by Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, drawing on ibn Taymiyya. Also, Saudi Arabia's export of its xenophobic version of Islam--Wahhabism--throughout the Mideast since 1962.
- A terrorist organization--Al Qaeda--that has access to considerable funds has appeared for the first time.
- Highly skilled terrorist leadership, seen in Osama Bin Laden, his cohort Ayman al Zawahiri and their associates, appeared for the first time in Al Qaeda.
- Arab and Muslim hostility toward the United States rose during the decade before 2001. This gave Al Qaeda a friendly sea in which to swim. The roots of this hostility probably lie in six causes:
  - U.S. support for corrupt authoritarian Arab regimes in Egypt, Saudi Arabia.
  - U.S. economic sanctions on Iraq after 1991, which were alleged (I think wrongly) to kill many innocents.
  - U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait after 1991--considered a sacrilege by some Muslims.
  - The continuing Israel-Palestinian conflict, especially the fighting that raged from September 2000-2005; combined with tacit U.S. backing of Israel's expansion into the occupied territories. The U.S. has given large aid to Israel (some \$3 billion per year) while Israel has exported settlers (500,000 since 1967) into Arab territories it conquered in the 1967 war. U.S. aid to Israel is essentially unconditional, so Arabs see the U.S. as backing Israeli expansion and colonization of Arab lands.
  - Al-Qaeda propaganda, combined with U.S. failure to answer this propaganda or otherwise conduct an effective effort to counter false anti-American claims.
  - Saudi Arabia's export of its xenophobic version of Islam--Wahhabism--throughout the Mideast since 1962, as noted above.
- The cost of making weapons of mass destruction has fallen, the expertise needed to make them has spread, and the number of states trying to make them has grown. Pakistan, Iran, and North Korea--all friendly with terrorist groups--have joined the game. There is fear they will supply/sell/lose control of such weapons to terrorists.
- The collapse of the Soviet Union raised the risk that terrorists could buy weapons of mass destruction, or the skills or materials to make them, from Russian sellers. (The U.S. and Russian governments finally seem to be getting this risk under control.)

F. Why was the terror threat unforeseen?

- There is no powerful agency in Washington that could increase its budget by pointing to the terrorist threat. For example, the military doesn't address terrorists and so has little interest in pointing to the danger they pose. There was no "department of counterterror" whose budget depended on public concern about terror and would gladly sound the tocsin when the threat appears.
- The American press failed to cover the anti-Americanism that grew in the Arab world in the 1990s. This was a remarkable professional failure.
- Al Qaeda's capability was impossible to measure until it was demonstrated. The skill of a terrorist group can't be seen in satellite photos.

II. THE TERROR THREAT TODAY

Al Qaeda poses a large threat.

- A. Al Qaeda remains alive and potent. Some of the pre-9/11/01 Al Qaeda leadership remains at large and new leadership has emerged. Al Qaeda

lost its Afghan sanctuary in 2001 but moved to northwestern Pakistan and there continued on a more decentralized basis. It also has sanctuaries in Yemen and Somalia. Its Afghan Taliban associates threaten the Karzai regime in Afghanistan, and its Pakistani Taliban associates threaten the Pakistani government. U.S. intelligence warns that the U.S. remains at risk of a large terrorist attack.

- B. Al Qaeda is very ambitious. It seeks to wreak vast, perhaps boundless, destruction and murder in the U.S. Osama Bin Laden proclaims that "to kill Americans ... civilian and military--is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible."<sup>1</sup> His former press spokesman, Suleiman Abu Ghaith, claims a right for Al Qaeda to kill four million Americans, including two million children.<sup>2</sup> Previously some terrorism experts had argued that terrorists only want large audiences, not large numbers of dead. Clearly Al Qaeda breaks that mold.

Al Qaeda has shown considerable skill and patience--more than other groups. This group may have the skill to acquire and use weapons of mass destruction.

### III. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF COUNTER-TERROR

- A. Counter-terror is a war of intelligence, not firepower. Terrorists that can be found can be dealt with; finding them is the hard part.
- B. Counter-terror requires large innovation in U.S. national security policy--away from traditional military functions and toward intelligence, public diplomacy, nation building, saving failed states, homeland security, and diplomacy to lock down loose nukes around the world.

### IV. U.S. COUNTER-TERROR STRATEGY: A WAR ON TOO FEW FRONTS?

- A. What missions might an effective counter-terror strategy include? Eleven missions might be mentioned. The Bush administration was criticized for focusing unduly on the first mission while neglecting others. How is Obama doing?

1. **The military/intelligence offensive.** The military/intelligence offensive, to include preventive war. Go abroad and roll up al-Qaeda's organization and sanctuaries. Deter states from giving such sanctuary, and destroy states that do.

The Bush administration focused on the offensive--the hunting of Al Qaeda, the destruction of its Afghan sanctuary, and the denial of new sanctuaries. This offensive had some successes (destroying the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, in 2001) but also failures (the escape of Al Qaeda's leadership from Tora Bora in Afghanistan in late 2001, the revival of the Taliban after 2001).

The Obama administration has continued the offensive. Most important, Obama has chosen to wage war to contain or defeat the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan. His assumption: the Taliban remain allies of al-Qaeda and will give al-Qaeda a sanctuary in Afghanistan if they win power there. Some dispute this claim.

Obama has also waged an intense Predator/Reaper war against Taliban and al-Qaeda militants in Pakistan.

2. **The defensive.** The FBI remains focused more on crime solving than terror prevention. Local law enforcement has not been engaged in terror prevention. U.S. borders remain quite open. U.S. nuclear reactors and chemical plants remain vulnerable and inviting targets

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<sup>1</sup> In 1998, quoted in Anonymous, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2002): 59.

<sup>2</sup> In 2002 Abu Ghaith announced on an Al Qaeda-affiliated web site, [www.alneda.com](http://www.alneda.com): "We have a right to kill 4 million Americans--2 million of them children--and to ... wound and cripple hundreds of thousands." Quoted in Graham Allison, Nuclear Terrorism: The Ultimate Preventable Catastrophe (New York: Times Books, 2004): 12.

for terrorists. U.S. ports remain open to devastating attack. U.S. biodefenses have been strengthened but the U.S. remains vulnerable to bioterror. U.S. insurance laws governing terror give businesses little incentive to harden their infrastructure against terror.

3. **Lock down loose nuclear weapons, materials, and scientists.** Bush 41, Bill Clinton, and Bush 43 all moved slowly to lock down loose nuclear and biological materials and scientists in Russia and elsewhere. This was a dangerous policy error (now being fixed).
4. **Wage a war of ideas.** To defeat Al Qaeda the U.S. must reach a modus vivendi with the wider Muslim world. This requires changing the terms of debate in the Muslim world. Muslim discourse must be channelled in less hostile directions.

Public diplomacy--propaganda if you will--should play a large role in this vital effort.

But U.S. public diplomacy efforts have been half-hearted. The books, articles and media products one would expect produced in a serious war of ideas are not being produced. Where are the Arab-language and other Muslim-language coffee table books with glossy photos and personal histories documenting the cruelties of al-Qaeda, of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, and of Islamist rule in Sudan and Iran? A handful of oral historians and photographers could have produced these quickly. Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa, the current featured public diplomacy broadcast projects, are ineffective. And the Voice of America Arab language service has been shut down!

This is a large failure as the U.S. has good answers to most charges made against it by Al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda claims that the last century has seen vast unprovoked one-way violence by the U.S. and other western states against Muslims, who themselves were peaceful. In fact violence has run both ways between non-Muslims and Muslims--not one way only. Islamic Sudan slaughtered two million non-Muslim South Sudanese (1983-present), Sudan supports the murderous Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, Islamic Indonesia mass murdered 200,000 Christian East Timorese (1975-2000) and 400,000-500,000 of its Chinese minority (1965), Islamic Turkey mass murdered 600,000-1,500,000 Christian Armenians in 1895 and 1915. Muslims have plenty of non-Muslim blood on their hands. Also relevant are the crimes of Muslims against Muslims: Saddam Hussein's mass killings of Kurds, Shias, and others (totalling perhaps 400,000-500,000 Iraqis killed), Hafez Assad's slaughter at Hama, the vast crimes of the Islamists in Algeria since 1992, and the Iran-Iraq war. Muslims make a weak case when they demand vengeance against others for committing deeds they tolerate among themselves.

The Qur'an says: "**Believers, if an evil-doer brings you a piece of news, inquire first into its truth, lest you should wrong others unwittingly and then regret your action.**" (Qur'an, 49:6). Perhaps this is the basis for a dialogue to narrow differences about history.

5. **End inflammatory conflicts that feed al-Qaeda.** Al Qaeda feeds on war, especially wars involving Muslims. Hence the U.S. must work to end such conflicts. They include: the Israel-Palestinian conflict, the India-Pakistan conflict, and the Iraq war.

To end the Israel-Palestinian conflict: some suggest the Obama Administration should frame its own final-status peace plan and coerce both sides toward it with carrots and sticks. Everyone knows what that final-status plan should look like. It should exchange near-full Israeli withdrawal for full and final peace and full acceptance of Israel by the Arabs. In other words, the terms outlined in Saudi Abdullah plan of 3/02 or the Clinton bridging proposals of 12/00.

Regarding Kashmir and Iraq: same idea? Frame a final status agreement and use carrots and sticks to push both sides toward it.

6. **Save or resuscitate failed states? or develop a strategy to intervene against terrorists in such states?** This issue has been much-debated regarding Afghanistan. Should the U.S. try to resuscitate the Afghan

state? Or ignore the Afghan state, and simply intervene directly against the Taliban if it grows too strong or behaves too badly.

Additional possible missions:

7. Spread democracy, destroy authoritarian rule in the Muslim world.
8. End poverty, bring prosperity to the Muslim world, ROW.
9. Get the US out of the Middle East--pull US troops from the Mideast region? (Robert Pape recommends.) And/or reduce or cut US ties with Israel?
10. Deny financing to terrorists by counter-finance activity.
11. Deny terrorists communication space (deny them the world wide web?)
12. Negotiation/deterrence/appeasement?? Make terrorists become more benign??

What research is needed on these or other missions?

What tactical issues need study?

B. Another framework: Al-Qaeda as an organism.

The Bush administration 2005 National Security Strategy (written by Douglas Feith) argued that al-Qaeda is like an organism and can be defeated by denying it the means of its sustenance. Specifically, al-Qaeda needs eight key inputs that al-Qaeda requires for its operation. These required inputs are its vulnerabilities, and present the missions for a counter-terror strategy.

The eight inputs are: (1) Ideological support key to recruitment and indoctrination; (2) Leadership; (3) New recruits; (4) Safe-havens for training and planning; (5) Weapons, including WMD; (6) Funds; (7) Communication and movement, needed for gaining intelligence and for exerting command and control over operatives; (8) Access to targets, especially in the United States.

- C. **Needed: large policy innovation.** Winning the war on terror will require large innovation in U.S. national security policy. The U.S. should put relatively less resources into traditional military functions--army, navy, air force--and far more resources into counterterror functions. These include intelligence (terrorists that can be found can be dealt with--finding them is the hard part), homeland security, diplomacy to lock down loose nukes and bioweapons around the world, public diplomacy, and nation building/saving failed states. But the organizations that carry out these functions--the intelligence agencies, local law enforcement, the Coast Guard, the Cooperative Threat Reduction Initiative (CTR), the State Department Office of Public Diplomacy, the Agency for International Development, etc.--are politically weak in Washington, so are bound to lose out in Washington budget battles. And most governments, including the U.S. government, are very reluctant to innovate. Can the U.S. government innovate to the extent required?

V. A WAR ON TOO MANY FRONTS? DOES A GENERAL "WAR ON TERROR" LEAD THE U.S. TO ATTACK DRAGONS THAT WOULD NOT ATTACK US?

Should the U.S. wage a "War on Terror"? President Bush 43 defined a broad crusade. His rhetoric frames a war with all who use the terror tool. This includes scores of groups worldwide that have never viewed the U.S. as enemies, from the Kashmiri rebels to the Tamil Tigers to the Colombian FARC to the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda to Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Israel/Palestine.

President Obama more narrowly defines the enemy as Al Qaeda.

VI. THE LONG RUN: TWO SCARY TRENDS RAISE RISKS OF WMD TERROR

Two worrisome long-term trends raise the risk of terror with weapons of mass destruction.

- A. Rising violent religious fundamentalism in Islam, Hinduism, Christianity and Judaism creates an energy source for future terrorists. It raises the danger that more Al Qaedas could be born.

Millennarian fundamentalism is especially dangerous and has increased markedly among Muslims, Christians, Jews and Buddhists over the past 15 years. (See Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, The Age of Sacred Terror [NY: Random House, 2002.] )

- B. Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) technology and knowledge are spreading

relentlessly.

1. Weapons of mass destruction will grow constantly more accessible to terrorists as technology relentlessly advances and technical knowledge disperses.
  - a. The price of making WMD falls steadily as technology advances until it becomes affordable by terrorists.
  - b. The internet has a disastrous downside. It enables groups with only rudimentary research skills to quickly learn what they need to assemble and use WMD or to launch other grand terror attacks.
2. As noted above, the Soviet collapse dispersed technical knowledge as Soviet nuclear, biological and chemical weapons scientists scattered. And Soviet weapons materials are at risk of theft or sale to terrorists.

- C. The spread of bioweapons and the resulting risk of bioterror pose a striking danger, perhaps worse in some ways in the long run than the danger posed by nuclear weapons. (Discussed in our previous class on national security policy.)

Some, including myself, were lulled about the bioterror danger before 9/11/01 because the United States and most other major powers were uninterested in developing bioweapons. (The U.S. abandoned its offensive bioweapons program in 1969). We inferred from this that bioweapons weren't very useful and so wouldn't be developed or used. But while bioweapons may be unuseful to **states**, they are very useful to **terrorists** who seek vast destruction instead of finite military objectives. The appearance of skilled terrorist groups that aspire to mass murder, like Al Qaeda, means that a new class of potential bioweapons users has appeared. These weapons now have customers!

Many were also lulled by the world's success in surviving the nuclear revolution. They assumed that nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons were all of a piece--all were "weapons of mass destruction"--and that measures that worked with one (arms control, deterrence) would work with all three. But, as noted last week, bioweapons are far to control by agreement than nuclear weapons and their use is harder to deter. This is because bioweapons are more likely to be obtained by non-deterrable terrorists and arms control to halt their spread is far harder.

(My thinking on bioweapons has been strongly informed by Greg Koblentz, an MIT political science department Ph.D. and an expert on biological war. His recent book elaborates these points.)

#### VII. SATISFACTORY ANSWERS ARE HARD TO FIND!

- A. One answer: Isolationism toward the world and Stalinism with a democratic face at home in the U.S. Tight surveillance of all human activity by a vastly increased state security apparatus. This is a dreadful specter but we will be driven there unless we find other answers to the grand terror risk.
- B. Other answers to address the long term terror danger:
  1. Build a worldwide regime to corral and lock down WMD. This regime would require a new U.S. foreign policy--a U.S. willingness to offer quid pro quos to others (e.g., security guarantees and a willingness to play peacemaker) in exchange for their acceptance of inferior military status. But as noted above biological weapons can be only poorly controlled by such a regime so it offers only a partial answer.
  2. Make vast investment in counter-bio-terror measures? Depends on the measures. All agree that public health preparations would be wise. Developing defenses against synthetic viruses requires developing the viruses themselves--a dangerous move.

These answers seem inadequate to me, so the future looks worrisome.

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