

A Plan for Political Warfare

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The United States has been sucked into a world-wide conflict with terrorism, a struggle in which America will prevail only if it acts effectively both on the military and political fronts. Two realities have to be faced squarely:

- Terrorism is political warfare. By deliberately and indiscriminately killing innocents, it is designed to break the will of the opponent. Counterterrorism also has to involve political warfare. It must strive to isolate the terrorists politically in order to extirpate them physically.

- Not religion as such, but political resentments, often energized by fanatical religious beliefs, fuel terrorism. The current struggle is not against "Islamic terrorism," just as the struggle against the IRA is not against "Christian terrorism." The suppression of terrorist organizations and activities must therefore also address some, if not all, of the political resentments that galvanize support for terrorism.

The U.S. Response

It is in that broad context that the U.S. must shape its long-term, medium-term, and immediate response to the attacks. The long-term response should promote an international coalition to enhance domestic security as well as to undermine political support for terrorist causes. The medium-term response will have to target the governments that tolerate or clandestinely support terrorism, while disrupting the terrorist networks that operate in the Middle East, Western Europe and North America. The immediate response will have to involve direct military action against known terrorist facilities and leaders in Afghanistan and the Middle East, as well as against the Taliban regime.

The long-term response—over the next several years—in some ways is the easiest to outline. It should focus on shaping a world-wide coalition of states that share an interest in reduced vulnerability to terrorist acts. The sharing of intelligence, more tightly coordinated police actions, more transparent financial transactions, and the exposure of money-laundering operations, are all objectives that the majority of governments share, including China and Russia. No political or financial payment by the U.S. for participation in such a campaign should be expected since enhanced security is needed by all. Russia should be particularly sensitive to that need, given that the Soviet Union helped to organize, train and arm many of the terrorist groups that are antecedents of the current threat.

Much of that long-term effort will have to be focused on Western Europe and the U.S. The more democratic the govern-

ment, the easier for terrorist networks to conceal themselves and to strike. It is clear that most of the preparations for the recent attacks were pursued over several years—with remarkable impunity and a disturbing lack of penetration by law enforcement agencies—within America itself.

The more difficult and sensitive aspect of the long-term response is the need to undercut political support of terrorism. Terrorists thrive on popular passions that spawn fanatical hatreds. Just as effective warfare against guerillas requires their isolation from supporting rural populations, so political warfare against terrorism calls for the mobilization of moderates against extremists. Toward this end, the U.S. should work toward a more rapid attainment of peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians (an early meeting

The first U.S. move should be military action. Longer term, it must work to create an international coalition against terror.

between Ariel Sharon and Yasser Arafat would be helpful); a more decisive campaign against Saddam Hussein's regime itself, and not policies that seem to harm the Iraqi people more than their dictator; a more flexible policy toward the more liberal elements in Iranian politics; and a more generous assistance for the Afghan and Pakistani peoples.

The medium-term response—over the next several months—will be the most difficult. It will have to focus on governments that have tolerated tacitly or secretly supported terrorist organizations, or perhaps even colluded in terrorist acts. If collusion is reasonably determined—for example, if Saddam Hussein provided organizational or planning assistance to the recent outrage—direct U.S. military action to destroy such a regime would be not only justified, but required.

In the meantime, covert action, as well as attacks by U.S. forces against identified terrorist training camps and other facilities in some Middle Eastern countries would be appropriate, though it would be wise to discriminate carefully the chosen targets. The possibility that the terrorists benefited from financial aid, perhaps exacted by blackmail, from rich members of some ruling elites should also precipitate intense and direct pressure on the pertinent regimes. Of course, an integral part of any medium-term response will have to

be a concerted effort by the U.S. and its allies to roll up the more obvious terrorist networks operating in Western Europe and America itself.

The most pressing decisions are the ones that need to be made immediately. A decisive, bold, and early military response is needed in order to underline America's commitment to the campaign against terrorism and, to put it bluntly, to exact painful retribution. That raises the question of how we respond, where we respond, against whom we respond, and—if possible, with whom we respond.

The response should not be overly personalized: The standard of success should not be whether Osama bin Laden is killed or captured, though either outcome would be highly gratifying. Rather, a successful strike would be one that inflicts a painful blow on the terrorist high command and its key facilities, some of which are located in Afghanistan, including the capture or elimination of some of the terrorists.

It is particularly important that any initial U.S. military reaction should involve Special Forces and other elite units. It should not be confined to cruise missiles fired from afar or bombs dropped from on high. Such previous technologically aseptic strikes have helped to create an image of a timid America that is not ready to roll up its sleeves and fight seriously.

Also for political reasons, it would be desirable for some of America's key partners (the British, French and Germans) to take part in any early reaction. Their participation would symbolize not only solidarity among allies but would convey the degree to which the response to terrorism is genuinely international. It would also help to keep America internationally involved.

A Comprehensive Strategy

Presumably, some of the early strikes will be aimed at the Taliban regime. Here, the key point is to pursue such operations without becoming involved in a ground campaign and without overtaxing the capacity of the government (and especially the army) of Pakistan to provide needed support. Apart from any assault on the terrorists themselves, the fundamental purpose of operations directed at the Taliban should be to galvanize domestic Afghan opposition to that regime.

The U.S. has been attacked and challenged. The tactics of our response have to be guided by a comprehensive strategy that is militarily relentless while politically sensitive.

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