

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

WEAKNESS AGAINST TERRORISM: FIFTEEN YEARS OF FAILED U.S. POLICY

by

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ABSTRACT

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The events of September 11th, 2001 shocked the world. Americans and the world watched in horror as two planes slammed into beacons of U.S. power and might; the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon, killing nearly 3,000 innocent people. That these attacks were successfully prosecuted against America was all the more shocking. After all, America was the lone superpower and, undeniably, had the world's most competent and strongest military – perhaps the strongest of all time. But these attacks should not have been unexpected. For the 15 years prior to 9/11, the United States failed to respond with strength while violent terrorist actions escalated. This paper argues that law enforcement and deterrence fail against terrorism. Only military strength in combination with effective arms of all elements of national power can defeat terrorism.

WEAKNESS AGAINST TERRORISM: FIFTEEN YEARS OF FAILED U.S. POLICY

...they were surprised at the collapse of American morale [in the American involvement in Somalia]. This convinced us the Americans are a paper tiger

—Osama bin Laden¹

The events of September 11th, 2001 shocked the world. Americans and the world watched in horror as two planes slammed into beacons of U.S. power and might; the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon, killing nearly 3,000 innocent people. That these attacks were successfully prosecuted against America was all the more shocking. After all, America was the lone superpower and, undeniably, had the world's most competent and strongest militaries – perhaps the strongest of all time. But these attacks should not have been unexpected. For the 15 years prior to 9/11, the United States failed to respond with strength while violent terrorist actions escalated. This paper argues that law enforcement and deterrence fail against terrorism. Only military strength in combination with effective arms of all elements of national power can defeat terrorism. The paper begins with the last effective use of military force against terrorism before 9/11; President Reagan's military strike against Libya in 1986. The paper then chronicles the escalation of terrorist violence from then until 9/11 in order to show that American actions during that 15 year period did nothing to prevent terrorism. Instead, American reactions and policies emboldened the enemies of the nation to increase the violence with each successive strike. Finally, the paper posits that success in Iraq, a battle in the Global War on Terrorism, is necessary to prevent further escalation.

Strength Against Terrorism

At approximately 7 P.M. on April 14, 1986, American bombers attacked five different military targets in Libya. In a televised address to the nation two hours later, President Ronald Reagan explained that he had ordered the attack in response to a terrorist bombing of a Berlin nightclub often frequented by U.S. servicemen on April 5, 1986. The terrorist bombing killed two U.S. soldiers and a Turkish woman and injured more than two hundred others. President Reagan conveyed to the American public that weeks prior he had warned Libyan leader, Colonel Muammar Qaddafi, that his regime would be held accountable for any new terrorist attacks launched against American citizens. Reagan made clear that the U.S. had direct, precise, and irrefutable evidence of Qaddafi's complicity in the Berlin bombing as well as solid evidence of other imminent attacks against U.S. installations, diplomats, and American tourists worldwide. America, under Reagan's leadership, would not stand idly by. As Reagan

concluded that address, he said, "I warned that there should be no place on Earth where terrorists can rest and train and practice their deadly skills. I meant it. I said that we would act with others, if possible, and alone if necessary to ensure that terrorists have no sanctuary anywhere. Tonight, we have."²

As President Reagan said to the nation and the world that night, "there is no security, no safety in the appeasement of evil."³ Unfortunately for too many years since that bold military strike against terrorist activity, the United States and the West failed to stand up to terrorists despite continued attacks on innocent people and mounting evidence of a serious threat to U.S. national security. Of the more than 2,400 acts of anti-U.S. international terrorism that occurred from 1983-98, it is noteworthy the United States decided to apply overt military force in response to only three: President Reagan's strikes against Libya in 1986; U.S. strikes against the Iraqi Intelligence Service Headquarters in June 1993 after a foiled plot to assassinate former President George Bush via a car bomb in Kuwait that April; and the U.S. missile attack against alleged bin Laden facilities in Sudan and Afghanistan following the bombing of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.⁴ The attacks of 9/11 confirmed that indeed U.S. policies of the previous fifteen years had not only failed to stem the spread of violence against innocent people; but instead, had emboldened terrorists and permitted the largest unprovoked attack in American history. What follows is a chronology of the critical attacks and the American response as well as other events that demonstrate failed U.S. policies in dealing with the significant and growing issue of terrorism from 1986 and 2001.

The Bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Scotland

On December 21, 1988, Pan Am Flight 103 enroute from Frankfurt to New York exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing all 259 passengers on board, including 189 Americans, plus 11 people on the ground. The investigation into the incident concluded that the plane had been brought down by a small amount of plastic explosives concealed in an audio cassette player inside a checked suitcase. A global criminal investigation was launched, but distraught families of American victims were not satisfied and insisted that President Bush appoint a commission to determine how the bombing occurred and if any security measures had lapsed. Reluctantly, President Bush created the President's Commission on Aviation Security and Terrorism (PCAST).

The commission issued its findings almost 10 months later on May 15, 1990. The report faulted both Pan American and the Federal Aviation Administration for lax security procedures and concluded that the bombing could have been prevented had luggage been properly

screened. The report contained more than 60 detailed recommendations designed to improve civil aviation security and to deter and prevent terrorist attacks. Perhaps its most controversial recommendation however, was that the United States should be prepared to take preemptive or retaliatory military actions against terrorists. The panel recommended “a more vigorous U.S. policy that not only pursues and punishes terrorists but also makes state sponsors of terrorism pay a price for their actions.”⁵

But even after the criminal investigation resulted in charges against two Libyan intelligence agents, the United States did not retaliate as Reagan had just days after the Berlin disco bombing in 1986. When Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi refused to turn the agents over for a trial, the United States and the United Nations imposed economic sanctions on Libya. For over a decade, Qaddafi held out, but finally allowed the agents to be tried by a Scottish court sitting in the Netherlands. One agent was convicted and one agent was acquitted. The judges concluded that the Libyan government was behind the bombing.

The American response to this terrorist incident was nothing short of weak. Despite the strong recommendations in the PCAST report, Presidents Bush and Clinton failed to take decisive action. Instead, these administrations negotiated with Qaddafi for the return of the suspects for a trial. This brutal act of aggression was treated solely as a law enforcement matter. Military action should have augmented the investigative and prosecutorial actions.

The 1993 Bombing of the World Trade Center

On February 26, 1993 a Ryder rental truck carrying a 1,200 to 1,500 pound bomb exploded in the parking garage under the World Trade Center, blasting a 200 foot-wide crater through six sublevels of concrete. The blast killed six, injured over a thousand, and caused the evacuation of more than fifty thousand innocent civilians. Estimates vary, but the cost to businesses and individuals range as high as \$1 billion.⁶

The American response was once again a criminal investigation. Four Islamic extremists were convicted in 1994 for their roles in the bombing and in 1997, Ramzi Yousef, the plot's mastermind, and one other were convicted. Yousef was a terrorist with links to Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network.

Days after the attack, President Clinton was asked if terrorism would change America's way of life. Perhaps his response foretells how his administration would tackle terrorism. He said he had put “every conceivable law enforcement information resource” on the job, and while he was very concerned about it, he didn't want the “American people to overreact to this at this time.”⁷ And FBI Director William Sessions, in testimony before a subcommittee of the House

Judiciary Committee less than two weeks after the bombing, stated that, “this suspected act of terrorism should not be viewed as an opening act of a coming wave of terror.”⁸ As the investigation of this bombing would eventually discover, the United States was in fact the target of attack by several Islamic extremists and terrorist groups. The United States failed to act with strength against terrorists bent on bringing down the World Trade Center. That miscalculation of strategy would eventually embolden and enable the terrorists to follow through with their goal.

Somalia Withdrawal

On October 3 1993, Task Force Ranger, a U.S. Special Operations Forces composed mainly of Rangers, Delta Force operators, and aviation support from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, attempted to capture Somalian warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid's foreign minister and his top political advisor as part of U.N. Operation Continue Hope, the mission which was to initiate nation building in Somalia, disarm the various factions, restore law and order, help the people to set up a representative government, and restore the infrastructure. The mission went terribly wrong when local Muslim militia pinned down the extraction convoy and two Black Hawk helicopters were shot down. By the time the task force was extracted the next morning, 18 U.S. servicemen had been killed and another 79 injured. Pictures and video of dead U.S. soldiers being drug through the streets of Mogidishu by a celebratory band of militia chronicled the embarrassing defeat of the American military.⁹

President Clinton's response was to order the U.S. forces to stop operations immediately. He also reappointed Ambassador Robert B. Oakley as special envoy to Somalia in an attempt to broker a peace settlement and then announced that all U.S. Forces would withdraw from Somalia no later than March 31, 1994.

In Mogadishu, the Islamists set a precedent – the United States could be terrorized into abandoning a Muslim land. As Mark Bowden concluded in his book, *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War*, “the lesson our retreat taught the world's terrorists and despots is that killing a few American soldiers, even at a cost of more than 500 of our own fighters is enough to spook Uncle Sam.”¹⁰

Osama bin Laden claims to have played a major part in the aggression of the Islamist militia in Mogadishu, having provided weapons, training, decision making, and general leadership duties for the uprising. He considered the defeat of American forces in Somalia as a turning point not only for the Islamist movement, but for his rise in stature among many terrorist organizations as the leader of the jihad against America. As bin Laden claimed in his 1996 fatwa:

But your most disgraceful case was in Somalia; where - after vigorous propaganda about the power of the USA and its post cold war leadership of the new world order - you moved tens of thousands of international force, including twenty eight thousand American soldiers into Somalia. However, when tens of your soldiers were killed in minor battles and one American pilot was dragged in the streets of Mogadishu you left the area carrying disappointment, humiliation, defeat and your dead with you. Clinton appeared in front of the whole world threatening and promising revenge, but these threats were merely a preparation for withdrawal. You have been disgraced by Allah and you withdrew; the extent of your impotence and weaknesses became very clear.¹¹

And in a 1998 interview with ABC's John Miller, bin Laden spoke of the Somalian incident.

They [American military] can run in less than twenty-four hours, and this was also repeated in Somalia...[There] they forgot about being the world leader and the leader of the new world order. [They] left, dragging their corpses and their defeat, and stopped using such titles.¹²

The quick and complete removal of troops from Somalia following the death of 18 soldiers showed America's weakness and aversion to casualties. This single incident did more to embolden terrorists worldwide than any other event. The Battle of Mogadishu also led to a profound shift in American foreign policy, as the Clinton Administration became increasingly reluctant to use military intervention in Third World conflicts. Some might argue that President Clinton was justified in pulling the military out of Somalia, citing only a peripheral national interest there. While the food relief effort could be classified as only a peripheral interest, more importantly was the growing presence of terrorist training activities in these countries. But more important than that was the sign of weakness to the terrorists that would embolden them and incite an escalation of violence against the West. Osama bin Laden exploited this weakness and used it as a rallying cry for increased violence against the United States.

Terrorist Plot to Blow Up American Planes in Flight

On December 11, 1994, a bomb exploded on a Philippine Airlines flight enroute to Tokyo. The bomb killed one passenger and injured ten others, but was not big enough to take down the plane because the pilot was able to make an emergency landing. We now know that this bombing was a test run for a much larger terrorist plot to destroy American planes in the Far East. The plot's mastermind was Ramzi Yousef, the still at-large terrorist convicted of planning the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993.¹³

The larger bombing of several airliners was never conducted, however, because of sheer luck. Two terrorists – both with strong ties to bin Laden's terror network–started a fire in the Philippines while mixing the chemicals for the bombs. Police apprehended one of the terrorists and uncovered the bombing plot, which was to have occurred only days after the fire. Yousef

lived in the same apartment building where the fire occurred and fled to Thailand as the fire broke out. He was apprehended in Pakistan in February 1995 by FBI agents and State Department Diplomatic Security Officers acting on a tip from an informant. He was extradited to the United States and was tried and convicted for conspiring to bomb the U.S. airliners. With Yousef's cell essentially collapsed, American investigators also discovered they were in the advanced stages of several other plots to unleash terror on America, including a plan to strike the CIA headquarters with a small plane loaded with explosives and a plan to blow up 11 American commercial airliners simultaneously as they approached U.S. airports.¹⁴

Once again, the American response to thwarted terror attacks against U.S. citizens was to track down the perpetrators and bring them to justice. Despite the arrests and convictions, the terrorist movement was gaining momentum. The threat of jailing is an ineffective deterrent for terrorists and does little to disrupt future violent activity. Al-Qaeda documents and statements clearly dictate to the terrorists that they have only two destinations: martyrdom and a U.S. prison, each as equally pleasing to God.¹⁵ With each successful operation against America, Osama bin Laden gained self-confidence and the respect of terrorists worldwide. To keep his followers motivated, it was important for bin Laden to continue strikes and escalate the effects. U.S. military action was sorely needed to disrupt terrorist cell routines, attrite their membership, hinder communications, prevent funding actions, and obstruct detailed planning necessary for their success. Once again, the military element of U.S. national power was neglected.

Bombing of Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia

On November 13, 1995, a car bomb in Riyadh killed five Americans and 2 Indians. Eight months later, on June 25, 1996, a tanker truck laden with explosives was parked within 80 feet of Khobar Towers, an apartment complex in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia that housed approximately 3,000 U.S. Air Force personnel. The truck exploded minutes later, killing 19 and wounding over 500. The terrorists escaped the scene, but six suspects were soon apprehended and imprisoned by the Saudis.

Intelligence collected between the two incidents revealed the apartment complex was a potential terrorist target. Nonetheless, the law enforcement activity following the first incident failed to stop the Khobar Towers bombing.¹⁶ And following the apartment bombing, only another law enforcement campaign was launched.

Louis Freeh, the FBI Director from 1993 to 2001, wrote recently in *The Wall Street Journal* that the Clinton Administration refused to request permission from the Saudi government for U.S. officials to interview the suspects after it was learned they had direct ties to several senior

members of the Iranian government. After 30 months of inaction by the Clinton administration, a frustrated Freeh turned to then ex-President G.W.H Bush, who was traveling to Saudi Arabia to meet with Crown Prince Abdullah on another matter. Freeh briefed President Bush and asked that he request permission to interview the suspects. President Bush did so and the Crown Prince granted the permission within hours of their meeting. The FBI interviewed the suspects, confirming direct complicity of the Iranian officials in the bombing that killed 19 Americans. Unfortunately, the Clinton Administration elected to drop the issue of Iranian involvement.¹⁷

After five years of contentious investigation between the FBI and the Saudi government, on June 21, 2001 a U.S. federal grand jury indicted 14 people, 13 of which had ties to the pro-Iranian terrorist group Hizballah. At the time, 11 of the terrorists were in custody in Saudi prison. To this date, the United States has yet to bring even one person to justice. Again, the United States' actions against terrorists were weak and ineffective. Law enforcement was bringing suspects to justice, but little was being done to thwart future capability. Violence continued to escalate and would likely continue until military action was effectively applied.

Bombing of American Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania

In almost simultaneous attacks on August 7, 1998, truck bombs exploded in American embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, killing over 220 people, including 12 Americans, and wounding more than 4,000 others.¹⁸

Almost immediately, U.S. intelligence pointed to Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network as the perpetrators. Less than two weeks after the bombings, President Clinton ordered a series of cruise missile strikes on terrorist targets in Sudan and Afghanistan, announcing the strikes in a primetime address on American television. The strikes caused extensive damage to buildings at three terrorist training camps in Afghanistan, and Afghan officials estimated 20 to 50 people were killed. However, the buildings were repaired or replaced and the camps were quickly back in operation. The strike on a suspected chemical weapon plant in Sudan was highly controversial as the Sudanese government claimed it was merely a pharmaceutical plant. Whether it was a chemical munitions plant or a pharmaceutical factory was moot. The worldwide outcry served the terrorists' purpose. No further military action was taken in retaliation for the bombings.

Aside from military action, the United States ineffectively used other means of national power. For example, the State Department announced a \$5 million reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of bin Laden. In June of 1999, bin Laden was placed on the

FBI's most wanted list. President Clinton signed Executive Order 13129 in July 1999, freezing Taliban assets in the United States, blocking all U.S. trade with the Taliban, and barring U.S. citizens from contributing money to the group who was harboring bin Laden. The U.S. successfully lobbied the U.N. Security Council to issue a resolution on October 15, 1999, demanding the Taliban turn over bin Laden within 30 days, or face limited economic sanctions. The sanctions took effect in November after Taliban leaders refused to provide bin Laden. *The Washington Post* reported the defiance of the Taliban, quoting them as saying, "We will never hand over Osama bin Laden...He will remain free in defiance of America. We will not hand him over to an infidel nation."¹⁹ The UN imposed new arms embargoes on the Taliban a year later, but still they refused to produce the terrorist leader. Half measures did not work and bin Laden's stature continued to rise as he remained at large. The bombing came months after bin Laden had issued his fatwa against the "Jews and Crusaders", calling for Muslims "to kill the Americans and their allies -- civilians and military-...in any country...possible..."²⁰ The American embassy bombings, and no significant retribution from the United States emboldened bin Laden to plan and conduct even more horrific acts of terror in his jihad.

The CIA had a plan to capture bin Laden and rehearsed it three times in early 1998. The 9/11 Commission concluded they had legal authority to do so, through a 1986 presidential finding that authorized covert action against terrorism.²¹ Incredulously, CIA director George Tenet turned off the takedown just days before planned execution, citing that "someone might get killed, including bin Laden."²² Again, in December of 1998, acting on credible intelligence gathered in Afghanistan by the CIA, the National Security Council quickly assembled to consider a cruise missile strike to try to kill bin Laden. Once again, the plan was scrapped because innocents may have been killed.²³ In the face of a terrorist leader summoning Muslims to kill Americans and their allies, and clear evidence of his role in several acts to do just that, the American government was concerned about collateral damage in taking down the leader of the jihad. Bin Laden was free to continue his planning for the ultimate attack.

President Clinton's Pardon of Puerto Rican Terrorists

In August 1999, President Clinton offered conditional clemency to 16 prisoners from the Puerto Rican terrorists group, Armed Forces for National Liberation (FALN), a group that carried out more than 130 bombings in the United States in Puerto Rico in a quest for Puerto Rican independence. The 16 prisoners were serving sentences ranging from 35 to 90 years, convicted of conspiracy to commit robbery, bomb making and sedition, as well as firearms and explosives violations. Most had served 19 years at the time of the clemency offer.

President Clinton made the offer of clemency against the advice of the Justice Department and the FBI. The senate passed a nonbinding resolution condemning the offer by a 95-2 vote and the House passed a similar measure 311-41. The House Committee on Government Reform issued a report in December 1999 saying the White house repeatedly misrepresented facts during the controversy. The report further denounced the move saying, "the clemency decision undermines the United States' position in the international fight against terrorism," and warned that the decision could empower not only the FALN, but terrorists throughout the world.²⁴ Nevertheless, President Clinton proceeded with the offer and fourteen convicted terrorists (two did not accept the offer) were released from prison; another sign of the Clinton Administration's softness on terrorism.

That the United States could do this in the face of the myriad terrorist acts against the nation as chronicled above is incredulous. Perhaps the final version of the Senate resolution on the matter best describes the absurdity of this act:

Whereas the President's offer of clemency to the FALN terrorists violates longstanding tenets of United States counterterrorism policy; and Whereas the release of terrorists is an affront to the rule of law, the victims and their families, and every American who believes that violent acts must be punished to the fullest extent of the law: Now, therefore, be it Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That making concessions to terrorists is deplorable and that President Clinton should not have granted clemency to the FALN terrorists.²⁵

Attack of the USS Cole

As the U.S. Navy guided missile destroyer, USS Cole, made a routine refueling stop in the Yemen port of Aden on October 12, 2000, a small craft with two individuals approached the port side of the ship and exploded, blasting a 35-by-36 foot gash in the ship. Seventeen sailors were killed and thirty-nine others were wounded. The surviving crew members valiantly worked to save the ship from sinking. They succeeded and the Cole was eventually transported back to the United States aboard a huge Norwegian salvage boat. After \$250 million in repairs, the Cole was recommissioned and is back in service for the Navy.

This attack was carried out by two suicide bombers of al-Qaeda and directly supervised by bin Laden. Expecting U.S. military retaliation after the bombing, bin Laden evacuated his Afghanistan training compound and dispersed his top lieutenants. The retaliation, however, never came. According to the findings of the 9/11 Commission, bin Laden wanted the United States to attack, and if it did not he would launch something bigger. They also concluded that the Cole attack galvanized al-Qaeda recruiting efforts, especially when no U.S. retaliation

came.²⁶ Richard Clarke, President Clinton's counterterrorism czar, told the 9/11 Commission that he believed there was not much interest in retaliation in the White House, in spite of mounting evidence of al-Qaeda and bin Laden responsibility for the attack. Instead, he believed President Clinton, National Security Advisor Berger, and Secretary of State Albright were concentrating on a last minute peace agreement between the Palestinians and the Israelis prior to the change of Administrations. George Tenet, the CIA Director, also told the Commission that he did not remember having any discussions with Berger or the President about retaliation.²⁷ Once again, the United States did essentially nothing to counter the growing and overt terrorist activity. Fed by increasingly violent actions against the world's lone superpower, with little in the way of retaliation or disruption, bin Laden was poised to strike the largest single attack on America in its history.

American Response to Attacks of 9/11

Immediately following the attacks of 9/11, President Bush put the world on notice that the military arm of U.S. national power would be a major component of the response. President Bush declared war on terrorists and those who harbored them, and called for the nation to support what would be a protracted campaign – one the citizens had most likely never witnessed. In his address to the nation on the night of September 11, 2001, President Bush said, "Today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature."²⁸ As Reagan did in his address to the nation on the situation in Libya in 1986, and so many other times during his strong leadership, President Bush was courageous enough to see evil for what it was and call it evil. Days after the 9/11 attacks, in an address to a Joint Session of Congress and televised to the world on September 20, 2001, President Bush solidified America's resolve to fight a Global War on Terrorism ...

Americans are asking: How will we fight and win this war? We will direct every resource at our command -- every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war -- to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network...Our response involves far more than instant retaliation and isolated strikes. Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen.²⁹

The nation rallied behind the president: George W. Bush's job approval rating soared after the attacks to the highest ever recorded in opinion polls, peaking at 92 percent on October 9th of that year. Even a year later, eight of ten Americans polled were still optimistic about the future of the country.³⁰ The international community as well was strongly behind President Bush.

Less than a month after the attacks, President Bush launched Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, with objectives of destroying terrorist training camps and infrastructure within Afghanistan, the capture of al-Qaeda leaders, and the cessation of terrorist activities in Afghanistan. Within two months U.S.-led coalition forces had routed the Taliban government and seriously crippled al-Qaeda terrorist ambitions in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Operation IRAQI FREEDOM was launched on March 23, 2003, with the stated objectives to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam Hussein's support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people.³¹ Within weeks, the Iraqi military was defeated. On April 9, 2003, Baghdad fell and on May 1, 2003, President Bush declared the end of major combat operations, terminating the Baath Party's rule and removing Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from office. It appeared that the Global War on Terrorism had quickly notched another campaign victory with very few casualties and very little sacrifice from the American public.

But the successful defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan and regime change in Iraq came quickly and with relatively few casualties. Victory was won with precision bombing, standoff weapons, a highly effective special operations force, and very small conventional ground forces. The quick and overwhelming military victories in Afghanistan and Iraq invited new risks for how to prosecute what, from the outset, appeared to be a long, protracted fight against terrorism. The technologically advanced American military may have raised the bar of expectation for war. For many Americans, their only exposure to U.S. military engagement had resulted in quick and stunning victories: Grenada, Panama, the first gulf war, the successful air campaign in Kosovo, and now the overthrow of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein. Had this strength caused Americans to expect nothing but “clean” wars, with few casualties, rapidly executed and quick to victory?

The groundswell of support following the 9/11 attacks and these stunning victories has largely eroded. Nearly four years after the fall of Baghdad, the U.S. military is still in Iraq, embroiled in a sectarian insurgency, fueled by al-Qaeda terrorists with assistance from Iran and Syria. Over 3,000 American servicemen have been killed and American resolve is questionable. President Bush's carte blanche to do essentially anything necessary to protect the nation has all but disappeared. Over time, the country has gotten back to normal lives, barely affected by a war fought by volunteer warriors in lands far from home. Citizens have not been asked to sacrifice. Memories are short. People are safe. There has been no attack on American soil since 9/11. The war has been fought “on the cheap”, not the total effort President Bush declared to the nation before Congress on September 20, 2001.

However, America cannot repeat the strategic failures of the 15 years leading up to 9/11. For nearly every terrorist attack against America in those years, America embodied military weakness; engaging in mostly law enforcement activities, rarely implementing military action. The response from the terrorists each time was escalation of violence, culminating in the devastating attacks of September 11, 2001. Failure to stay strong in the current fight may further embolden the enemies of America. An escalation of the tragic results from 9/11 may be unimaginable, but as history has illustrated, almost certainly predictable. An enemy with avowed aims to destroy America would not hesitate to detonate a nuclear device among innocent American citizens.

Military strength may not deter ideologies, especially against terrorists willing to die for their cause. But military strength, in combination with other elements of U.S. national power, can be effective in destroying terrorist capabilities to wage violence. The strong response against terrorism since 9/11 has resulted in almost six years since a terrorist attack on American soil. The strong response has attrited key terrorist leadership and followers, degraded their freedom of movement, disrupted their ability to plan and communicate, encumbered their funding activities, and foiled several violent acts. Terrorists understand strength and strength has been effective.

Whether America continues the long war on terrorism remains to be seen. Perhaps it is even debatable whether the Global War on Terrorism would have been launched by President Bush if not for the attacks of 9/11. He may not have had the political capital to launch what was initially overwhelmingly embraced by American citizens. Regardless, the nation is at war with elements that desire the total destruction of America and its way of life. Although the conflict in Iraq has not gone well, the consequences of failure there are catastrophic. Terrorists worldwide are watching the situation in Iraq. They don't believe America has the will to fight a protracted war. As bin Laden may have presciently claimed in 1998, "We have seen in the last decade the decline of the American government and the weakness of the American soldier, who is ready to wage cold wars and unprepared to fight long wars."³²

Terrorists have publicly stated their end desires. The war in Iraq is but a battle in the Global War on Terrorism. If this nation is to win the larger war, victory in Iraq is imperative. To fail in or withdrawal from Iraq is to repeat 15 years of failed policy in the face of terrorism. National resolve and military strength are necessary. As Sir Edmund Burke said, "The only necessary thing for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." The United States cannot repeat the failures of the 15 years prior to 9/11. It must continue the fight against evil; its future depends on it.

Endnotes

¹ Robert Fisk, a British journalist has interviewed bin Laden three times; once in Sudan and twice in Afghanistan. This quote is from the March 1997 interview, available from <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article10374.htm>; Internet; accessed 19 December 2006.

² President Ronald Reagan, *Address to the Nation on April 14, 1986*, available from <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/41486g.htm>; Internet; accessed 18 December, 2006.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Michele L. Malvesti, "Explaining the United States' Decision to Strike Back at Terrorists," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 13 (Summer 2001), 86.

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⁷ William J. Clinton, "Remarks and Question and Answer Session at the Adult Learning Center in New Brunswick, New Jersey," *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 1 March 1993.

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⁹ The story of this battle was made famous by journalist Mark Bowden in his 1999 book, *Black Hawk Down : A Story of Modern War*, which was later adapted into a film of the same name. The facts of this paragraph were reconfirmed by Larry Parker in "The Battle of Mogadishu," found on the Internet at <http://www.militaryhistoryonline.com/general/articles/mogadishu.aspx>; accessed on 23 December 2006.

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¹⁵ Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, Inc.), 189. This book was later published by Potomac Books, and the author, Michael Scheuer, a former CIA specialist, used his real name.

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²³ *Ibid.*, 131.

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²⁷ The 9/11 Commission Report, 196.

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