

A Political Strategy for Winning the War on Terrorism

By Larry Diamond

Since September 11, the United States has been at a war against an evil and elusive enemy.

This war has necessary conventional elements of military action, but it will not be “won” in any conventional military sense. At bottom, the war against terrorism is a political struggle and it will require a diverse array of offensive and defensive tactics—blending hard and soft instruments of power—over a prolonged period of time.

Four guideposts of a political strategy will be crucial:

1. Militarily, we are confronted with the formidable challenge of asymmetrical warfare. This means that we cannot defeat the enemy with conventional military means alone. We must rely more heavily on intelligence, mobility, alliances, innovative technology, and in conjunction with these, the exercise of America’s awesome military might. It was the combination of these forces that made for the brilliant victory of the U.S. and allied forces in overthrowing the Taliban, in the first phase of the war on terrorism.
2. The asymmetry of threat has exposed the U.S. homeland to grave danger of catastrophic attack. For only the second or time in our history, we face the real danger that our entire government could be destroyed by enemy action. We must take steps to defend our country and our political system against this danger. And

these must include ceaseless and far-reaching efforts to contain proliferation of the technology and raw materials of mass destruction.

3. This war we have entered has only begun with the overthrow of the Taliban and the disruption of the Al Qaeda network. It will not end even if we apprehend Osama bin Laden and his evil sidekick, al Zawahiri. Al Qaeda and other terrorist networks are fluid and decentralized. We confront a protracted struggle over beliefs, ideas, symbols, and ways of life, and this war can only end in victory when our ideas and values have clearly triumphed over those that seek to destroy us. In this and related respects, we have entered a new Cold War, and we must learn from the lessons of the previous one.
4. We need a political strategy for containing, reducing, and preempting violent rage against the United States and Western civilization—in the Islamic fundamentalist forms this hatred now takes, and in the forms into which it might mutate in the future. In the short run, this requires an effective war of information and ideas, and prudent assessment of the political consequences of our military actions. In the medium to long run, it compels a concern about the quality of governance and legitimacy of allied regimes and the conditions for sustainable development in troubled countries.

I. The Challenge of Asymmetrical Warfare

When a rubber dinghy full of explosives can blow a crippling hole through one of the world's mightiest battleships, we know we are in a new era of warfare. The signs of this emerging era

have been accumulating for a long time. It is crucial that we adapt our military structure and tactics to the challenge at hand.

Through more or less conventional military engagement, we won a great victory in Afghanistan. And that crushing victory—overthrowing a regime—has sent a powerful political message to the world. We don't tuck and run when we are attacked. We will fight back, even ruthlessly if necessary, but we will also take our time, plan, and execute our attack to fit the situation. As George Shultz remarked at the Hoover Institution yesterday, one of the elements of genius in the Bush Administration's response was precisely that it did not rush into action, but designed a brilliant and devastating military campaign.

But that campaign was only the first phase in a long war. I am not going to elaborate here much on the military dimensions of the challenge. But we are going to have to be prepared for a long and global struggle on the military front, in which intelligence and special forces will need to be deployed, in partnership with many allies, on a wide range of fronts, and not always in ways that we will know about immediately. We have to go on the offensive to attack terrorist networks in many different places. That is why U.S. special forces have now been deployed with the Philippine Army to track down the Abu Sayyef terrorists in the Philippines.

We are also going to need a much more vigorous law enforcement presence in this country and internationally to track down terrorist criminals. Recently, my colleague at Hoover, Joseph McNamara, the former chief of police of San Jose, observed that during the last few years, Congress increased the number of Drug Enforcement Agency personnel by 26 percent while adding only 2 percent to the F.B.I. He wrote,

The magnitude of the country's drug problem remains undiminished. On the other hand, if the F.B.I.'s paltry 11,500 agents (New York City has 40,000 police officers) had been expanded by 26 percent to work against terrorism, the many federal blunders that permitted a devastating act of war against our country most likely would have been avoided.

We are going to need a larger, smarter, more agile intelligence apparatus as well, to identify not only specific terrorist actors but also to help us understand the social and political milieus from which these twisted ambitions arise. If we are serious about winning the war on terrorism, and about our national security, then we have to respect intelligence work as a noble and important element of our mission. My message to able young people who are interested in the world and care about their country is: think about a career in intelligence.

II. Defending our Homeland—and our Democracy

Not since the darkest days of the first Cold War has the United States homeland faced such a grave risk as we do today of massive destruction and loss of American lives. We may never again face the level of danger of mutual annihilation that prevailed during the Cuban missile crisis. But the most alarming threat to our homeland and way of life does not come from hijacked airplanes or anthrax. The gravest threat is that terrorists will succeed in acquiring fissile materials and will use them to fashion a far more horrific terrorist weapon than anything we have yet seen.

In a stunning article in the November 5 issue of *The New Republic*, Gregg Easterbrook observed:

If detonated in a major metropolitan area, a crude atomic weapon—of the sort that could be carried in a truck or SUV—could kill 100,000 people or more and render the vicinity uninhabitable for years. In Washington, D.C., such an attack would destroy democracy’s seat and kill most of American’s leaders. Enemies of the United States probably have the technical capacity to make atomic weapons and have definitely tried to obtain the materials necessary to build them.

No element of the war on terrorism is more important than this one. We must spend whatever it takes, and mobilize a political energy, focus, and will heretofore lacking, to get control of nuclear materials and prevent them from falling into the hands of terrorists.

The most urgent priority is a *dramatic escalation of programs to consolidate and secure Russia’s control over all of its nuclear materials*. Russian control over former Soviet nuclear weapons sites and spent nuclear fuel is shockingly lax. Former Senator Sam Nunn—who has led with Senator Richard Lugar a visionary effort to get a grip on the proliferation problem—estimates that there is now “very poor” protection for 60 percent of Russian nuclear materials. Through a program of assistance, we have helped the Russians improve security at sites containing the other 40 percent, but, says Nunn, “at the current rate, it will take 20-25 years to secure it all.”¹ Before September 11, we were moving in the wrong direction. The Bush Administration proposed cutting \$100 million from the program to provide advanced security at former Soviet nuclear weapons sites. Congress has recently restored \$70 million of that cut, but we need to do much more. We need a crash program to secure all of these materials, and to ensure that every Russian scientist with the technical knowledge to construct

weapons of mass destruction is sufficiently well remunerated and engaged so that he is not tempted to sell his expertise to terrorists or rogue states.

This is one of many respects in which U.S. and Russian interests now deeply converge. Both administrations must now regard non-proliferation as an overriding priority, and one that deserves a place near the top of the agenda of bilateral relations. What is the point of spending tens of billions of dollars on a national missile defense system that will not be ready for years, if we are unwilling to spend a fraction of that to defend against a far more plausible and imminent threat? The same goes for nuclear materials in other countries, including Pakistan. There is no more important global security imperative than making sure that nuclear materials—in actual weapons and in forms that could be fashioned into weapons—are under secure command and control.

We need to tighten the noose as well on dual-use technologies. Easterbrook reports that Iraq—under the guise of purchasing six lithotripsy machines to treat kidney stones—obtained from a German medical company eight high-speed switches that can be used in atomic warheads. “Why,” Easterbrook asks, “did Iraq require lithotripsy when millions of its citizens lack basic antibiotics?” And why did we not see immediately the motive when Iraq requested another 120 switches as “spare parts”?

We may also need to make more forceful use of deterrence. One reason why many analysts in the intelligence community are skeptical that Iraq is behind the current anthrax scare is because they believe Saddam understands that if he uses a weapon of mass destruction against the United States, we will retaliate in kind. But will this deter Saddam from helping terrorists to obtain nuclear materials for an attack on the United States that would not otherwise be organized or coordinated by Iraq? A more explicit message of deterrence may be needed.

None of this may be enough. The plain truth is that we cannot be sure that the Al Qaeda network—which has been intensely seeking a nuclear weapon as a “religious duty,” in bin Laden’s words—does not in fact already have one, or the raw materials of one. September 11 launched a completely new era in the history of the United States and the world. There are well organized and—at least until recently—well financed individuals who hate the United States and the West with such a maniacal passion that they will do anything to kill as many Americans as possible.

There is no way the terrorists can mobilize enough power to destroy the United States. But with a crude, well-placed atomic weapon, they could destroy our government and our political system. We cannot allow any possibility, however remote, that that could happen.

We need a constitutional amendment to provide for the immediate replenishment of our national government in the case of a catastrophic attack. The line of presidential succession is composed entirely of officials who work in Washington and could all be killed instantly by a nuclear terrorist attack. We could draw on the genius of our federal system by designating the 50 state governors (ranked by each state’s population) as next in line of succession (after the Vice-President, the House Speaker, the Senate President pro tem, and the cabinet). Political legitimacy in a democracy requires clear rules for determining who will govern. The same principle must apply to congressional succession. Governors are already authorized to fill Senate vacancies by appointment, but there is no procedure other than special election for filling a House seat. State legislatures should be authorized by a constitutional amendment to fill vacancies to the House of Representatives when more than one third of the seats in the House are vacant. We need similar provisions to replace the Supreme Court. William Safire

suggests that the current court could “designate a shadow Supreme Court, made up of the chief judges of the federal appeals courts.”²

These are merely ideas. A bipartisan commission appointed jointly by the president and the Congress could, through sober and reflective deliberation, develop a package of amendments to fill the gaps in our political readiness. While they are doing so, the president should designate and minimally prepare a site that could function as the nation’s capital if Washington, D.C. should be rendered uninhabitable or temporarily dysfunctional by a weapon of mass destruction.

It is sheer hubris to think that because we are so rich, so smart, so technologically advanced, so democratic, and so justified in our cause, we cannot be brought down. In an era of asymmetrical warfare, our nation’s capital is vulnerable. We cannot allow for even the remote prospect that a well-placed, well-timed terrorist attack could sever the 225-year continuity of our democracy and leave us utterly void of legitimate national authority.

III. Waging the New Cold War

What I have said so far involves offensive and defensive initiatives for the short to medium term. But September 11 has plunged us into a much more diffuse and longer-term struggle. September 11 will be viewed by historians as the dividing line between distinct periods in world history. From the late 1940s to 1989-91, there was the Cold War. From 1991 to September 2001, there was a period of relative peace, prosperity, and democratic hegemony—the immediate post-Cold War period. Now we have entered a protracted period of heightened uncertainty and insecurity, more violent conflict, increased social and political turbulence, and

possibly more reversals of democracy, both subtle and overt. We are back to a long, twilight struggle over ideas, loyalties, regimes, and even ways of life—a second Cold War.

One of the most important things we can learn from the previous Cold War is that ideas matter. And information matters. Ultimately, we won the Cold War because our ideas were better, more promising, and more humane, and they produced a superior economic, political, and social system. And we won because we succeeded in getting out the truth about the bankruptcy of the communist system and the promise of free societies. If our potential adversaries are to see that promise, they must have broad and intensive exposure to independent and credible information, as well as to our values and ideas. We must do more—much more—to broadcast and disseminate in Arabic, Farsi, Pashtu and other indigenous languages the truth about what is happening, and the principles and ideas of economic and political freedom, of human rights and the rule of law. We must ratchet back up the whole machinery of public diplomacy that has badly decayed since the end of the first Cold War and the ill-advised merger of the U.S. Information Agency into the State Department.

Here are some practical imperatives:

- 1) Preserve the independence of the Voice of America and increase its budget that so it can broadcast more hours, with more linguistically skilled personnel, from more and more powerful transmitters. Radio is our single best medium for reaching people abroad, and even illiterate listeners can discern over time whether a station is trying to be objective or feeding a U.S. government line.³ But right now, our Arabic service reaches only a tiny fraction of the potential audience in the Arab world.
- 2) Fund a Radio Free Afghanistan to provide a voice for the long-term *political* struggle against Islamic extremism.

- 3) Increase support for indigenous moderate alternatives in the civil societies of troubled countries, through institutions like the National Endowment for Democracy. People in contested and hostile societies must see that liberal ideas have relevance for their own societies. This requires that the articulation of these ideas come not simply from Western figures (living and dead) but from compelling and authentic voices in their own societies and cultures. This means supporting liberal secular voices and moderate Islamic thinkers who seek political and social reforms and are not hostile to the United States. Such people and organizations exist in the Arab world but they are now squeezed between the iron grip of the state and the frenetic mobilization of religious extremists.
- 4) Renew the national commitment to foreign language and area studies, with significantly increased federal government and private foundation funding. To win the information war—and the intelligence war—we need many, many more speakers and readers of Arabic and other relevant languages than we now have. We need a deeper understanding of these societies, their histories, their politics, their cleavages, and their grievances. We need to restore the balance that has been lost in the discipline of political science, where too many of the leading scholars and departments now look down with contempt on area specialists as glorified journalists or unscientific historians. At universities around the country—not least this one—the Middle East has been an area of particular neglect. Eight of the top 17 political science departments (including Stanford) do not have a true Middle-East specialist. Twelve of the 17 lack a tenured specialist in the Middle East and twelve also lack a tenured specialist in South Asia. We have a critical lack of capacity to

understand and interpret parts of the world that are fundamental to our national interest. It must be repaired both inside and outside of government.

If we are to win the war of ideas and information, we need as well substantive change in our policies. We must be seen to have some underlying consistency in our beliefs. If, as is now the case, Muslims in many countries believe that we have double standards—that we support freedom, democracy, and the rule of law where it suits us, and support leaders who crush these values when those leaders serve our interests—our ideological message will not be credible.

This presents us with the sharpest dilemma we confront in the new Cold War, and hardly an unfamiliar one. In the immediate weeks and months ahead, we need the support of autocratic and corrupt regimes in order to combat global terrorist networks and the states that sponsor and help those networks. But many of these regimes are increasingly fragile precisely because of their corruption and oppressiveness. We cannot sever our alliances with these regimes. But neither can we simply cling to their venal coattails while they brutalize any sign of opposition. In key countries such as Egypt, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia, we need to pursue a delicate strategy that works with these governments while also pressing for reform. Where we embrace repressive regimes in the short term, we must not call them democracies or laud them for their internal politics. Rather we must actively engage a broad range of elites in the state, the ruling party, the military, the intellectual and media establishments, and the business community with a common powerful message. Like the autocratic regimes of East Asia facing the communist threat in the early 1950s, their backs are up against the wall. If they do not improve the quality of their governance and start delivering development, they risk being

overwhelmed by the extremist tide. If they do reform, they can generate growth and reduce poverty—the only way to disarm the radical threat over the long run.

We need creative, adept, shrewd and nimble ambassadors who can walk the fine-line between the need for short-term security support and the pressure for long-term systemic change. American and other Western embassies must work in concert to identify, encourage, and embolden reformers within (or on the margins of) the political establishment, especially the new, emerging generation of elites. In this way, pressure from outside and pressure from below (in civil society) might intersect with pressure from within the state and the political system to generate viable coalitions for reform. It is absolutely vital that our major European allies—especially Britain, France, and Germany—reiterate this same message if it is to have any chance of it registering.

This strategy might work. But it might not. We need to begin thinking about the unthinkable in the Middle East. The Saudi regime is weak and decadent, and it is not clear that it will be able to save itself. We cannot dismiss the possibility of Islamic revolution in a country with the world's largest oil reserves. And if we cannot dismiss that possibility, we need to diminish our dependence on oil imports. And we need to do it now, while oil prices are sagging and the danger is still at bay. We should fill the Strategic Petroleum Reserve from its current 53 days of imports to its capacity of 70 days. And we should embark boldly on new strategies for developing renewable energy alternatives that might sharply reduce our dependence on oil imports in the next ten to fifteen years. Developing renewable energy sources and alternatives to the internal combustion energy should be pursued with the same technological and political fervor as our quest for an atomic bomb during WWII.

Credibility in the Arab world, and hence openness to our message, also requires that we be seen to be active in the search for a fair and just settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We cannot stand off from this conflict, no matter how bitter and intractable it seems. Israel has a right to exist in secure borders, and we have always been right to support that principle. It has a right not to have its people blown up by Arab terrorists and its streets and installations relentlessly assaulted. It is in our national interest to help Israel defend those rights. But it is not in our national interest to have Israel gobbling up more and more Palestinian land for Israeli settlements. It is not in our interest to have Israel spilling Palestinian (and Israeli) blood to defend strategically pointless and politically indefensible settlements in Gaza and large sections of the West Bank. The Clinton Administration did come close to brokering a comprehensive settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. We cannot lose sight of the need to find a way to get the two sides back to the negotiating table. And we must not fail to convey sincere concern for the humanitarian plight of the Palestinian people and support in principle for their aspiration for a state. The Bush Administration's expression of support for the principle of a Palestinian state is a step in the right direction.

IV. A Longer-Term Political Strategy for Eclipsing Terrorist Rage

To prevail in the longer-term struggle against terrorism, we must rob the new Bolsheviks, masquerading as religious warriors, of the popular support, political sympathy, and state sponsorship they need to threaten civilized countries. Like Lenin and other communist revolutionaries of the twentieth century, the Islamic Bolsheviks are well educated and largely

come from middle- or upper-class backgrounds. But they mobilize deep reservoirs of sympathy and commitment among lower-class people who feel deprived, disempowered, and humiliated.

In their time, Marxist-Leninists were able to convince broad popular followings that the causes of suffering and injustice were capitalism and imperialism. The new Bolsheviks focus their political indictment the United States, the world's center of capitalism, and on the alleged imperialism of Israel, with U.S. support. And like earlier revolutionaries, they denounce their own regimes—allies (however superficial) of the United States—as corrupt and exploitative.

The problem for the United States is that many of the regimes we now depend on are indeed rotten. Predominantly Muslim populations are increasingly receptive to revolutionary and hateful appeals because they are fed up with the oppression, inequity, (in most cases) poverty, and extravagant corruption in which their societies have been mired. Disgusted with their rulers, despairing of peaceful change, they seek explanation of their personal torment and societal degradation.

This twisted logic resonates emotionally among a large and growing proportion of the one billion Muslims who stretch from Morocco to Indonesia—and even some who live or reside in Europe and the U.S. No amount of military force, law enforcement vigilance, and operational genius can permanently contain an army of suicide bombers stretching endlessly across borders and over time. We must undermine their capacity to recruit and indoctrinate new true believers. We must win the war of ideas and institutions.

It is vital to our national security that we comprehend the real causes of this global backlash and respond wisely to them. This is not—or at least not yet—a war between civilizations. It is not really a clash of values. The real problem is that peoples around the

world share many of the same goals. They want to live in dignity, hope, and prosperity, to be respected and to have some political voice.

The fundamental obstacle to their aspirations is their own governments. Around the world, no factor more profoundly obstructs development, stability, and human progress than the endemic corruption of lawless, feckless, unaccountable states. Unless this problem is vigorously addressed, we are not going to win the political war on terrorism.

What can we do?

1. *We need to be able to offer incentives for countries to improve their governance.*

Whatever we offer frontline states as a “reward” to support us in the war on terrorism, we must make clear that there is more assistance available to states that are serious about development. And we must have a new fund of development assistance that is only available to states that show commitment to good governance. There are two other incentives that we can also draw upon, trade liberalization and debt relief.

2. *Condition debt relief on good governance.* Relief must provide hard incentives for reform. Debt relief should be awarded to those states that permit a relatively free press, free associations, (in most cases) free and fair elections, and credible institutions to control corruption, including an independent commission for that purpose and an independent judiciary. Commitment to these institutions should be locked into place by suspending debt service payments of a qualifying country and retiring its debt at 10 percent a year for every year the country demonstrates a serious commitment to good governance.

3. *Expand political assistance to develop democracy and improve governance.*

Foreign assistance must view *political* development aid as a multi-faceted, long-term challenge and invest more heavily in it. No amount of foreign assistance, even from all bilateral and multilateral aid donors combined, can generate in itself an adequate flow of resources for development. Ultimately, these flows will require increased trade and foreign investment. If we want to promote economic development, we must do more to help build the institutions of good governance in both the state and civil society that will attract and foster investment.

Action is needed on a number of fronts simultaneously over a long period of time. People must be educated to know their rights and responsibilities as democratic citizens, and mobilized to exercise them. Independent civic organizations and think tanks must be supported to advocate for better public policies and institutions. Civil society organizations, and the social capital they generate, must be nurtured at the local grassroots level as well as the national one. Independent media—not only newspapers and television, but crucially in poor countries, radio stations—must be established and fortified. Support for civil society, periodically assessed and evaluated, must be targeted and sustained to help to generate or deepen the political demand for institutional reforms. Buoyed by this demand, the input, output, and accountability structures of the state and political system must be developed: parties, legislatures, local governments, a professional bureaucracy, and independent structures to administer justice and elections, control corruption, audit public accounts, and respond to citizen complaints.

4. *Be flexible about the sequencing of democratic reforms.* In some countries, democratization will be more sustainable if fully competitive and meaningful multiparty elections follow the implementation of fundamental economic and governance reforms. Restoring multiparty elections in Pakistan today without such reforms will not produce a democracy that is any more workable and accountable than the one that collapsed in October 1999. Similarly, in many Arab countries, democratization, to be sustainable, must be part of a comprehensive project to construct a more efficient, open, accountable, lawful, and legitimate state. In a program of gradual democratization from above, the timing of elections is crucial.⁴

In Egypt and much of the Arab world, reform-minded leaders will first have to modernize the state, control corruption, build a rule of law, and open real space for moderate alternatives if truly competitive elections are not to lead to an Islamic fundamentalist takeover. In the short run, we may have no alternative to these repressive regimes. But they cannot stagger on indefinitely through sheer repression, while their bureaucracies groan under the pressure to manufacture ever more useless jobs for exploding numbers of young people who will earn nearly worthless salaries. Unless these regimes begin to deliver real development through serious governance and market reforms, many of them are going to fall, sooner or later.

5. *Increase foreign assistance, but be more selective in its distribution.* If we are going to have an impact in the above ways, we are going to need significantly more resources. Our foreign aid budget has declined to the point where we simply do not have the resources to help a large number of countries realize development, even if

their governments are serious. Neither do these historically low aid levels give us much leverage to demand better governance and seriously reward states that provide it. For those poor countries that get serious about governance, we need to mobilize levels of international assistance (U.S., other bilateral and multilateral) large enough to dramatically improve public health, physical infrastructure, human capital, and other conditions that will stimulate and attract investment.

A long-term political strategy must cut to the heart of the problem. The new generation of threats to our national security—not only terrorism but international crime, drug trafficking, infectious disease, and environmental disaster—all breed in the swamps of economic failure and rotten, venal governance. Unless we help to develop states that work for the broader public good—to collect taxes, limit corruption, control crime, enforce laws, secure property rights, provide education, attract investment, and answer to their own people—countries will not develop and the violent rage against the West will not subside.

We have a chance to put these principles into practice in Afghanistan now. Afghanistan is a crucial test case and the world is watching. If, through a failure of nerve, courage, and imagination we do not step up to the challenge of helping Afghanistan to recover from its long national nightmare, what message will we send to the world about cooperating with the United States, and about the credibility of our promises and the seriousness of our purpose. If we are not to have wasted so much military energy and national treasure—including several American lives—we must help Afghanistan to get on the road to economic development and decent governance. As Thomas Friedman has made clear in his recent columns from Afghanistan, that cannot be done unless we help to place a significant international security force on the ground

in Afghanistan—with American troops participating, and with robust rules of engagement. This force must face down the warlords and armed extortionists who are already testing us, and help enable the Afghan people to establish a national army, an authoritative government, and a rule of law, so that development resources can actually reach the people. If we do not deal with the security challenges Afghanistan confronts, we can not pull it out of the swamp of lawlessness and brutality. And if we do not pull it out, it will once again become a haven for terrorists and a threat to regional stability and ultimately to our own security.

Not only in Afghanistan, but around the world, the scale and multidimensional complexity of the challenge we now confront is daunting. But it is not more daunting than what we confronted at the dawn of World War II or the first Cold War. With patience, patriotism, intelligence, and a clear understanding of the political nature of this struggle, we will prevail again.

¹ Quoted from an interview with Sam Nunn on “The Newshour with Jim Lehrer,” PBS, November 5, 2001.

² William Safire, “An Optimist’s What-If,” *New York Times*, October 29, 2001, p. A 15.

³ “Surveys of men in Afghanistan last year showed that 67 percent listened to the VOA every day.” *New York Times* editorial, October 10, 2001, p. A 26.

⁴ But here again we confront the painful dilemma that rulers in a position to negotiate reform typically lack the political will or skill to undertake it. Deferring democratic elections then merely reflects a strategy for deferring any serious political liberalization at all. Through creative engagement with the different elements of these regimes and their civil societies, and through tangible rewards for governance reforms, we need to help generate the political will and vision for democratic reform