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ment in Egypt—having made some pretense of reform with the presidential elections in September 2005 and parliamentary elections two months later—is now even more repressive than before 9/11, cracking down on judges, for instance, and imprisoning its political opponents on trumped up charges. The “Arab spring” that was touted by some commentators in 2005 now seems a distant mirage.

There can be no unified-field theory that explains what happened on 9/11; rather it was the confluence of the factors outlined above that help us understand the underlying causes of the attacks on New York and Washington. On 9/11, we were collateral damage in a civil war within the world of political Islam. On the one side there are those like Bin Laden who want to install Taliban-style theocracies from Indonesia to Morocco. On the other side, there is a silent majority of Muslims who are prepared to deal with the West, who do not see the Taliban as a workable model for modern Islamic states, and who reject violence. Bin Laden adopted a war against “the far enemy” in order to hasten the demise of the “near enemy” regimes in the Middle East, so his vision of political Islam could be installed around the Muslim world. And he used 9/11 to advance that cause. That effort has largely failed, but the underlying problems in the Muslim world remain virtually unchanged five years later and will likely provide the fuel for future attacks against us.

America the Vulnerable

Alexis Debat and Nikolas K. Gvosdev

WE ARE what we dream. In this respect, few fragments of America’s DNA are more fundamental than the myth that it needs—and can achieve—absolute security. While European and Asian nations have long learned to live with relative security from threats abroad and have configured their intelligence and security services accordingly, Americans oscillate between fantasies of total security and exhibiting a certain fatalism about the costs of action, trusting in Providence’s benevolence to keep us from harm. We worry about Al-Qaeda attacking targets like Indiana’s Amish Country Popcorn Factory, yet still only screen a small percentage of the cargo containers that enter U.S. waters. We hear that homeland security and the intelligence community need reform, but we already know such efforts will be tamed, chaotic and overly politicized. America still has not even heard of—let alone sorted out—the real, seminal choices to make in the War on Terror between relative security and relative democracy.

On the one hand, since 9/11 we have vastly expanded the U.S. security perimeter far beyond our borders, created an entirely new Department for Homeland Security, and added another level of bureaucracy to the intelligence community. Many Americans take comfort in the perception of greater security from more vigorous screening procedures at airports to increased surveillance of persons of interest. On the other hand, the multiple failures of federal, state and local governments to respond decisively and adequately after the disaster that was Hurricane Katrina as well as revelations about extensive waste and fraud with homeland security contracts including on systems that

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were supposed to screen for radioactive materials at American ports raise questions not only about how effective the post-9/11 response has been, but also about how far we can go under America's current political culture. A 2003 Council on Foreign Relations report warned that the United States was still dangerously unprepared to cope in the event of another catastrophic terrorist attack; its conclusions remain valid three years later. And chances are that they will be relevant for many years.

The American response, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, was an obvious move: taking the fight directly to Al-Qaeda. So far, the United States has won the first rounds in its War on Terror: Osama bin Laden and his organization have indeed been weakened and Al-Qaeda, driven from its base in Afghanistan, has been forced to change tactics. Some post-9/11 plots have indeed been foiled. But business as usual is never swimming very far below the surface in Washington; many policymakers reverted to the status quo as of September 10, 2001—whether it be using the homeland security budget as yet another place for pork barrel politics or conducting a foreign policy that seems calculated to dis-encourage other states from extending their full cooperation to us in fighting international terrorism.

One of the main problems is that the War on Terror was framed narrowly, as simply tackling the network that planned and executed 9/11, and setting short-term parameters for V-T day when the War on Terror will have been won. When then-CIA Director George Tenet spoke at the annual dinner of The Nixon Center in December 2002, many focused on his statistics: 1/3 of the leadership of Al-Qaeda captured or killed, some 3,000 operatives or associates detained, \$121 million in funds seized. The fact that there has not been another catastrophic attack on U.S. soil since 9/11 (even though there was an eight-year gap between the two World Trade Center attacks) has led to a certain degree of complacency. Less attention was given to what Tenet went on to say: "We cannot win the War on Terror simply by defeating and dismantling Al-Qaeda. To claim victory, we and our allies will need to address the circumstances that bring peoples to despair, weaken governments, and create power vacuums that extremists are all too ready to fill." Tenet, like too many people in Washington, was right, but only by half. The devil always sleeps in "how to."

Surely the threat was painted with style, and at times regime change could even seem pretty seen from Washington, but little room was made for realism. For example, it has become elegant, in Washington's Cold War-obsessed foreign-policymaking community, to compare today's challenge to the one posed by the Soviet Union. Certainly the Cold War introduced tools (transnational organizations such as the Comintern) and themes (like anti-imperialism) that Al-Qaeda has borrowed. But the comparison only goes so far. The Cold War was defined by competition between two superpowers along with their allies, involving the threat of total annihilation. To use the following analogy, if the Cold War threatened to incinerate the body to ashes, the terrorism we face today is a type of acupuncture designed to paralyze our nerve centers and to sustain a global insurgency. And the "acupuncturists" no longer require the support of a state to obtain and deploy their needles.

Beginning in the late 1980s, a combination of technological and societal forces emerged that led to a growing de-institutionalization or privatization of political and economic power. This can have positive effects: witness the development aid and public health programs that a private entity like the Gates Foundation can dispense. But it has also given groups the capability to mobilize, organize, gather resources, communicate and, most importantly, inflict casualties, all on a mass scale previously reserved only to states. The activities of the Aum Shinrikyo cult in Japan were a harbinger of what was

to come.

Linked to this has been a growing gap between means and ends. The ability to inflict mass destruction is no longer expensive nor does it require particularly advanced technology. Richard Reid's shoe-bomb explosive in December 2001 was a crude and deadly home-made nitrocellulose mix made of melted ping pong balls and nail polish remover. It was not a clever James-Bond-style device that could only have been provided by the intelligence service of a major power. A BBC investigation estimated that the 7/7 London bombings, which killed 52 people and injured hundreds and paralyzed the British capital, cost only slightly more than \$1,000 to carry out. While it has not disappeared (as evidenced by the events in Lebanon this summer) state-sponsored terrorism is gradually receding in the face of ego-terrorism, or political violence waged by a single individual or non-state group but with the means of a state. Whatever happens next in the War on Terror, mass destruction will remain only a mouse click, a credit card and a rental truck away. During the Cold War, we could not all be potential superpowers, but today, we are all potential terrorists.

Al-Qaeda reflects this profound societal shift. To pursue their ambitions of spreading activation throughout the global Muslim community, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri created a unique organization whose essence was less a structure than a function: creating connections. At its core, Al-Qaeda is a worldwide directory, an Internet, a global grid linking together thousands of disparate human, financial, military, intellectual and technical resources around a central mission. Through its training camps and discreet networking around the world, the group weaved throughout the 1990s a complex web linking together businessmen, clerics, fighters, journalists and criminals, some of whom belonged to terrorist groups such as the Algerian *Groupe Islamique Armé*, Indonesia's Jemaa Islamiya or Pakistan's Jaish-e-Muhammad. This ethereal and biomorphic nature is the main reason why Al-Qaeda's operational capabilities, diminished and degraded, certainly, by the campaign in Afghanistan and the increased efforts around the globe, are being restored. As the U.S. government and its allies closed some of these links, Al-Qaeda redirected them or activated new ones, especially in countries such as Pakistan or Iraq, where Western intelligence agencies have considerable trouble operating.

This biomorphic structure was then articulated with a creative ideological mix of violent Chomskyism and neo-Salafism, which has resonated profoundly throughout the world even beyond Islamic societies, where America is still conveniently viewed as the root cause of modernization, the villain behind corruption and loss of tradition, and the imposer of the sometimes astronomical social costs of economic transition in the name of the "Washington Consensus." Far from being a theoretical concern, this potent—and old-fashioned—anti-imperialist discourse, largely borrowed from the European Left, has scored significant points for Osama bin Laden. It has been a great operational concern to the CIA, for example, which has had to conduct the War on Terror against the sympathy that Bin Laden's discourse on anti-imperialism has sometimes generated among the Muslim world's political and military elites, not to mention the broad masses of the population. Al-Qaeda and its violent neo-Salafism have proven especially hard to understand for an American foreign-policy community still set in its Cold War ways and largely ignorant of Muslim societies, which are shaped by forces unknown or incomprehensible to Western social science. The negative effects of this profound ignorance was even multiplied by Washington's sometimes mind-boggling culture of political hubris. The effort by Democratic Senators Harry Reid, Richard Durbin and Charles Schumer to try and get Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki during his visit to

Washington this summer to make a statement endorsing Israel's campaign against Hizballah reflects an astonishing myopia about the tightrope so many governments face in wanting to cooperate with the United States, while dealing with public sentiment that looks often negatively upon America's purposes and methods, even in the War on Terror.

AMERICA'S OWN structural limitations made its response to 9/11 adequate only for the first phase of this complex challenge. Needless to say, our efforts, and even the way we look at the threat, are now wholly inadequate. But it will take more than a bigger budget or a new administration to get it right.

America, not only its politicians but also its people, will have to make hard choices, and decide now what it will and will not do in the pursuit of security against the terrorist threat. Even in the aftermath of 9/11, we have so far refused to make these choices, for reasons entirely political. We either define terrorism as an existential threat and completely overhaul our political and administrative system, or we decide to let things slide and gamble that a terrorist will not find or be able to exploit our vulnerabilities. We insist we want a 99.9 percent guarantee but seem to be satisfied with paying the costs for a system that can protect us 40 percent of the time.

Being the most open society in the world, America is not well organized for this type of conflict. Its federal structure and philosophy of competition between centers of power are considerable, if not insurmountable, roadblocks to the centralization of intelligence or homeland security responsibilities; and its archipelago of law enforcement entities from the local to the federal level makes homeland security a Herculean task. The biggest strength of Al-Qaeda is its capacity to hide its operatives, finances and bomb-making material within the global flows on which the United States draws its economic and political power, turning the free flow of goods, people and information as weapons against us. We cannot pay the price of isolationism; we have to develop better tools for trying to filter the global pathways and determine what level of risk we are prepared to accept in exchange for the benefits of an open global system.

The threat's international and transnational nature has also presented some difficulties for the current administration, whose capacity for enlisting and cultivating allies has significantly decreased in recent years. A disturbing trend has been the unraveling of what proved to be only a temporary sentiment of solidarity in the immediate aftermath of 9/11—that a major terrorist attack against one state, particularly the United States, threatened all states. Foreign governments largely see, rightly or wrongly, the United States as indifferent or even hostile to their interests and are increasingly prepared to view an Al-Qaeda threat against America as Washington's problem and, therefore, offer minimal cooperation—if even that.

American political culture, however, which increasingly allows parochial interests to preclude the development of a hierarchy of priorities, and our habit of thinking only in terms of two- and four-year election cycles make the emergence of a long-term counter-terrorism policy supported by political consensus a chimera. 9/11 produced no equivalent to the Truman moment. Congress, in particular, has shown little inclination to recognize that an effective counter-terrorism program not only requires putting politics aside, but also making choices and setting priorities with only partial and incomplete information and with finite resources. Insisting that an Amtrak station in Fargo receive the same amount of anti-terrorism support as JFK airport in New York, or that a nuclear plant and a suburban mall should receive equal priority, is a recipe for overstretch. The executive branch, meanwhile, has to lay out priorities, present the

costs and make the case for why choices have to be made.

Five years after 9/11, the United States remains highly and structurally vulnerable, despite the successes we have achieved against Al-Qaeda. The United States wants to achieve total security predicated on eliminating altogether the terrorist threat. But the new conditions of ego-terrorism make this almost prohibitively expensive (financially and politically) to achieve, especially if one wants to preserve a relatively open, free and pluralistic society. As long as it does not drive a profound wedge in our society (such as it threatens to do in India), terrorism is almost never an existential threat. Yet we have defined it that way, so far investing \$218 million per 9/11 fatality in the War on Terror to combat a social club which can regenerate beyond our capacity to physically eliminate it. But, so far, the political establishment seems unwilling to adopt the policies (and mindset) that would give us a better chance of drastically reducing the terrorist challenge and minimizing its outcomes. The War on Terror begins in Washington, by putting politics aside and making hard choices on what cannot and should not be done in the pursuit of security, in a context where almost any of us could replicate the Oklahoma City bombings.

If the Al-Qaeda timetable holds true to form, could we expect another attempt to deliver a major crippling blow on U.S. soil in 2009? But as far as many here in Washington are concerned, life doesn't extend beyond November 2008 and then it is someone else's problem. As a consequence, the threat and its response work on two completely different timetables. It is probably too late for 9/11 part two. Let's make sure we get it right for part three.

How Well Should You Be Sleeping?

Antony T. Sullivan

FIVE YEARS after 9/11, the United States is not winning the inaptly named "war" on terrorism. Individual victories have been won, and some enemy capabilities have been significantly degraded. But the larger struggle rages on, and seems likely to continue to do so for a very long time.

Al-Qaeda today has become an ideological movement rather than merely a single entity. Indeed, this transformation may constitute the greatest threat now posed by Al-Qaeda. Ideologies are much more difficult to destroy than organizations. While the strategic threat from what has been called "Al-Qaeda prime" may have lessened, the tactical threat posed by grassroots groups that now operate worldwide under its ideological umbrella has multiplied. As American complacency deepens and memories of 9/11 fade, Al-Qaeda, or its offshoots, wait. Unlike Americans, jihadists have a glacial sense of time.

Osama bin Laden knows all this. And that is why he probably continues to smile. Despite Al-Qaeda's failure to overthrow any Arab regime, or to mount another terrorist attack within the United States, Osama bin Laden undoubtedly believes that the

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