

Emerging Reality: Major Threats to the United States

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Background

This analysis was developed with multiple visits within the Department of Defense and to the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the National Imagery and Mapping Agency, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Central Command, the Joint Forces Command, the Space Command (as its leadership transitioned to the Northern Command), the Pacific Command, the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, dozens of general officers in the Capstone and Joint Warfighting Courses, experts at the National Defense University, members of the Joint Staff, senior and staff elements of the four armed services and some specialists in the State Department as well as consulting with experts on biological warfare and experts on Arab and Muslim culture.

Introduction

The tragedy and shock of September 11, 2001 has led to deep changes in the American view of the world as the emerging reality of major threats to the United States have become stunningly relevant. Americans are at risk in America with a sense of vulnerability that has never before existed—even in the Cold War.

Tragic as September 11th was, it was very small compared to the potential threat of weapons of mass destruction (and especially a nuclear or biological threat which could threaten the very existence of the American people and their way of life). The scale and enormity of the potential threat places controlling the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction at the top of our security agenda. Since these weapons potentially threaten everyone, efforts to assure American security ultimately increase the security of virtually everyone on the planet except aggressors and terrorists.



Reality of Weapons of Mass Destruction

American lives are in much greater risk from weapons of mass destruction and in particular from biological weapons of mass destruction than anyone is willing to address publicly. No other threat can potentially kill as many Americans as a biological threat. Determined enemies could create a potentially catastrophic loss of American life.

In 2001 we were stunned by 22 anthrax cases leading to five deaths. Because biological weapons are easily mass-produced it is as conceivable that next time we might have more than 100,000 cases within a few days. It is possible, although much less likely, that we could be faced with an engineered contagious biological (whether a Soviet developed smallpox strain or some new nightmare created through DNA engineering) in which case no existing vaccines would work.

The REALITY of weapons of mass destruction and the very real likelihood that they could be used to kill many Americans is not yet a REALITY in the political world or the bureaucratic world. We do not have the urgency, intensity, and mental ruthlessness appropriate to the threat that we could lose thousands of our fellow citizens any day.

In many ways we are engaged in activities without a grand strategy and we are moving at a pace more like the “phony war” of 1939-1940 than like the Battle of Britain that followed it. This may turn out to be okay. The potential threat may never materialize.

On the other hand if it does happen we will lose a lot of innocent people. Their families will want to know why we had not acted more decisively.

The Gray World and the Ungoverned Areas

There is a Gray World of people smuggling, illegal transportation (airplane, truck, ship), international arms dealers, international crime, narcotics, and illegal non-governmental organizations. This Gray World matters because it is a highly profitable, self sustaining, 365 day a year series of systems which can be used by any terrorist group (large or small) if they have enough money.

The Gray World is magnified by the existence of ungoverned areas in many nations for which we have extraordinarily limited knowledge. If we mean a policy of no sanctuaries we have to be prepared to penetrate and police these ungoverned areas.

Specifically, an ungoverned area is defined as a portion of a state that is outside the effective control of the central government. Such areas are marked by the state's inability to implement legitimate policies or to enforce law and order—the degree of state control may range from sporadic to non-existent.

An unclassified map produced by the Central Intelligence Agency shows just how formidable a challenge this is going to be. Twenty-two countries are designated as containing ungoverned areas infiltrated by terrorists and an additional 27 countries have been identified as containing ungoverned areas.

Instead of accelerating and deepening our efforts to understand and police the Gray World and the ungoverned areas, we have actually been shifting resources away from this challenge. There has been a significant decline in international narcotics intelligence since 9/11, even though narcotics smuggling could easily be the best way to bring biological weapons into the United States and narcotics from Afghanistan is a major source of the anti-American warlords' funding.

The intelligence agencies should be asked to identify all the major elements of the Gray World and all of the major ungoverned areas. They should then be asked to develop a plan for penetrating and monitoring those activities. The price would be dramatically higher than anything currently contemplated. If we do not master the Gray World and the ungoverned areas the price we pay in American lives may someday be horrific.

Reactionary Islam and its Terrorist Manifestations

We have defined our opponents too narrowly and thus made the war much smaller than it really is. This is not a "war against terrorists" in the sense that the German Baader-Meinhoff gang and the Italian Red Brigades were terrorists in the 1980s. They were very

isolated groups (which we now know from Soviet and East German archives were largely funded and directed by the Soviet Union despite the then CIA assertion at the time that there was “inadequate proof”). Those terrorists were isolatable in the population at large and represented a fringe element of very small, identifiable numbers.

This time we are faced with a guerrilla insurgency by the Reactionary wing of Islam. In particular the Wahhabi and Deobandi sects and the Iranian government via Hezbollah are providing funds, sanctuaries, recruitment, and moral purpose. This larger movement surrounds and sustains the process of hating America and being willing to protect and shelter those who would kill Americans.

Because this is a guerrilla insurgency rather than a cell based terrorist movement our current narrow definition of opponents leads us to a Vietnam style body count approach that makes as little sense in 2003 as it did in Vietnam. The decisive issue is not whether we can find and kill some terrorists. The key question is whether their movement is gaining new members, new resources, new sanctuaries and whether they can replace the captured and killed at a rate faster than we can eliminate them.

Unstable Countries and Potentially Aggressive Dictators

The challenge of unstable societies is more difficult than anything we are currently planning to deal with.

If a Reactionary Islamist replaces the head of Pakistan the increase in danger overnight will be catastrophic. Iraq, Iran, Libya, Syria, Indonesia, Algeria, and North Korea are all unstable societies in which something radical could occur any day.

If the Saudi government decided to aggressively stop the funding of anti-American activities they very likely would destabilize their society that has been based on a Wahhabi-Saud relationship for over 200 years.

The great difficulty of solving the Palestinian-Israeli problem is the challenge of creating a safe, healthy, prosperous and free stable society in Palestine capable of keeping the peace with Israel. Until that is solved every negotiation is chimerical because the Palestinian elites will not be able to control the killers and the Israelis will be compelled to respond to terrorist actions in ways that increase anti-Israeli and Anti-American sentiment.

Colombia is very unstable, as is the tri-border area of Paraguay. Several other countries in Latin America are more unstable than the current lack of attention from the United States would indicate.

It is clearly in America’s interest to uphold the legacy of FDR’s “Good Neighbor” policy: to raise living standards, to promote human rights and democratic institutions,

and to preserve peace and minimize potential threats to our security by promoting safety, health, prosperity and freedom

We are currently unprepared—lacking strategies and structures capable of coping with this level of instability. As recent events have indicated, we could find ourselves with multiple instabilities simultaneously and we lack the systems to manage several such activities at once just as we lack the strategies, structures and resourcing to ensure success in even one unstable society.

View that American Power and American Culture is the Greatest Danger to Some Countries and Cultures

Finally, it is hard to overstate the failure of the current American communications and foreign aid systems. Communications and foreign aid are linked because in the poor and unstable parts of the world the effective delivery of aid has to be the validation of our words and promises.

Our public diplomacy system has been utterly incapable of meeting the needs of the information age in reaching out to democracies or in waging an effective campaign in the Middle East. Recent examples of the growing attitude and support of anti-Americanism are everywhere:

The anti-American card prevailed in the German election and again in the South Korean election (forced to choose between fear of North Korea and anger at America, after 50 years of American protection, South Korea sent the signal they regarded us as a bigger risk). The fundamentalist Islamists won in Turkey (the most secular Muslim state).

More often than not, in many countries, the United States and American culture is viewed as a greater danger than any threats previously described.

Both the communications and the foreign aid effort need to be replaced with bigger, bolder, more decentralized and more entrepreneurial efforts. In the age of democracy and television it is extraordinarily dangerous for the American government to allow anti-Americanism to continue to spread without a thoughtful, powerful and sophisticated effort to communicate our values, our concerns and why we are better allies than opponents.

Traditional diplomacy worked fine when elites decided foreign policy without regard to the public. The rise of democracy, the Internet and television guarantee that people will be involved in setting the boundaries within which their governments can operate. With each passing year it gets more expensive for democratic politicians to side with the United States as their electorates' anti-Americanism grows more virulent.

The challenges of communicating in democratic, open societies are compounded dramatically by the challenge of winning the war of ideas in the Muslim world in general

and in the Arab world in particular. Our current communications efforts range from irrelevant to embarrassing.

In the past we have proven we can master the art of public diplomacy. We defeated decisively the Soviet financed peace movements in Europe in 1981-82. We mounted extraordinary campaigns in France and Italy in the 1940s. We mounted very successful campaigns in Poland, Hungary, and elsewhere in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Indeed many of the veterans of the 1980s are still available and could help design the scale, strategies and system necessary to communicate effectively.

Similarly, we have had past traditions of being effective in helping countries. The Marshall Plan was remarkably non-bureaucratic. The Marines built the best roads in Haiti in the 1920s (they are still the best roads). The Reagan administration cut through the red tape in Honduras, El Salvador and other countries with real effect. The current foreign aid efforts are too small, too strategically unfocused, too unconnected with communications, and stunningly too bureaucratic.

Summary

Americans feel more threatened than their allies because Americans have been attacked and Americans continue to be openly threatened. The fact is Americans ARE more threatened than their allies. Osama Bin Laden did not talk of millions of dead Europeans or Asians. He did talk of millions of dead Americans.

We have identified major threats of substantial proportions—threats not only to ourselves, but to global security as well. They are threats that will grow ever more dangerous if left unattended. After September 11, it became clear to most everyone that a free and peaceful world requires that aggression not be allowed to fester and grow. As President Bush states in his national security strategy: "As a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed. We cannot defend America and our friends by hoping for the best." The global war on terror has made transforming our armed services an urgent priority. We must not stand still.

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