STRATEGIC CHOICES

GRAND STRATEGY

Deterrence: A Cold War Strategy

During the Cold War, the United States adopted a foreign policy based on deterrence. Although many definitions of this policy exist, deterrence was almost always defined in terms of a coercive threat. As Thomas Schelling observed in 1966, deterrence is about intentions.[1] It is in Patrick Morgan's words "the use of threats of harm to prevent someone from doing something you do not want him to."[2] It can be argued that deterrence made sense in the context of the Cold War in which either one of two powers (the United States and the USSR) had the capacity to annihilate the other. After the end of the Cold War and the fall of the USSR, deterrence continued to be used by the United States and other countries, especially Israel, to combat national separatist movements thought to be a threat to local or regional security. Israeli

analyst Yehoshaphat Harkabi defined deterrence as the "threat of heavy punishment for an act by the enemy in order to persuade him to desist from that act."[3]

A critical aspect of deterrence was that it had to work. As Zeev Maoz put it, deterrence is

> A policy through which one attempts to scare off a would-be attacker by holding out a drawn sword. It works as long as the sword is not being used. When the sword becomes covered with blood, deterrence is said to have failed, no matter whose blood was spilled.[4]

In the United States, references to deterrence continued to be common in the military and policy communities as late as 1997. However, after the 9/11 attacks, President Bush ordered the Department of Defense to build a new strategy to address the increasingly deadly terrorist threat. In response to this directive, the Department of Defense assembled the National Defense University Task Force on Combating Terrorism. The task force proposed a "3-D" approach that had three principal goals: to defeat, deter, and diminish the enemy.[5] However, as Doron Almog observes, by the time the strategy was adopted, the word "deter" had been replaced with two others—"deny" and "defend."[6] The final document, issued in February 2003, thus put forth a "4D strategy" that rested on four pillars—to defeat, deny, diminish, and defend against the adversary.[7]

Armed with this new statement of purpose, the United States effectively abandoned the doctrine of classical deterrence that some believed became irrelevant with the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. The new doctrine made it clear that force would now be central to achieving U.S. objectives no matter how long these objectives took to accomplish:

> There will be no quick or easy end to this conflict. … Ours is a strategy of direct and continuous action against terrorist

groups, the cumulative effect of which will initially disrupt, over time degrade, and ultimately destroy the terrorist organizations. The more frequently and relentlessly we strike the terrorists across all fronts, using all the tools of statecraft, the more effective we will be.[8]

After 9/11: Preemption and Preventive War

The concept of preemption—and, every bit as importantly, preventive war—had already been introduced in the Bush Administration's 2002 *National Security Strategy,* which asserted that

> The United States has long maintained the option of preemptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security," and "the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.[9]

President Bush had addressed preemption in a major policy address at the U.S. Military Academy three months earlier on June 1, 2002. In this address, he stated, "If we wait for threats to materialize, we will have waited too long," and he declared that "our security will require all Americans … to be ready for preemptive action when necessary to defend our liberty and defend our lives."[10]

On June 6, 2002, the concept of preemption was further emphasized in a talk given by Vice President Richard Cheney, who, in a meeting with the National Association of Home Builders, declared, "Wars are not won on the defensive. We must take the battle to the enemy and, where necessary, preempt grave threats to our country before they materialize."[11]

At this time, the United States and coalition forces had already dispatched most of the remnants of al Qaeda in Afghanistan and were involved in replacing the now weakened Taliban regime with a new government led by Hamid Karzai. The remarks of the president and vice president, however, foreshadowed the run-up to the Iraq war. This became more apparent by the close of the summer of 2002.

By August of 2002, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, in an interview with *Fox News,* indicated that the United States could not wait for proof that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction. He then compared the prelude to war against Iraq with the prelude to World War II, when the Allies appeased Hitler, and he rejected alternative points of view other than war, saying

> The people who argue [against invading Iraq] have to ask themselves how they're going to feel at that point where another event occurs and it's not a conventional event, but it's an unconventional event.[12]

Within a month, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice was elaborating on the security strategy using a graphic analogy to convey the increased risk of waiting and the rationale for preemption: "We don't want the smoking gun to become a mushroom cloud."[13]

THE STRATEGY DEBATE

Not surprisingly, the shift toward a policy of preemptive force met with considerable debate. Ethicists weighed in almost as soon as the policy was formulated. On September 23, 2002, 100 scholars made a one-sentence statement in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*: "As Christian ethicists, we share a common moral presumption against a preemptive war on Iraq by the United States."[14] In October 2002, Paul Schroeder set forth the ethical case against the war in Iraq in an article in the *American Conservative*:

> A more dangerous, illegitimate norm and example can hardly be imagined. As could easily be shown by history, it completely subverts previous standards for judging the legitimacy of resorts to war, justifying any number of wars hitherto considered unjust and aggressive. It would, for example, justify not only the Austro-German decision

for preventive war on Serbia in 1914, condemned by most historians, but also a German attack on Russia and/or France as urged by some German generals on numerous occasions between 1888 and 1914. It would in fact justify almost any attack by any state on any other for almost any reason. This is not a theoretical or academic point. The American example and standard for preemptive war, if carried out, would invite imitation and emulation, and get it. One can easily imagine plausible scenarios in which India could justly attack Pakistan or vice versa, or Israel any one of its neighbours, or China Taiwan, or South Korea North Korea, under this rule that suspicion of what a hostile regime might do justifies launching preventive wars to overthrow it.[15]

Some military analysts applauded the new approach. "We have cast off old, failed rules of warfare" for a new paradigm "that makes previous models of warfare obsolete," wrote military analyst Colonel Ralph Peters.[16] Others challenged this position. "Adopting preemptive strikes (followed by bombing more massive than anything since World War II)," declared Colonel John Brinsfield, a former professor at the Army War College,

Should never be a normative part of our ethical thinking about war. To embrace preemptive strikes as normal policy rather than a very narrowly defined exception to the rules of civilized warfare is not to advance to a position of 'waging just wars humanely' (quoting Peters) but rather to retreat to barbarism, waging war whenever we think 'might makes right.'[17]

U.S. foreign policy analysts were divided. Neoconservatives, such as Irving Kristol and Charles Krauthammer, approved the policy as a means of protecting the United States and at the same time bringing needed reforms to other parts of the world. But as early as August 2002, in an opinion piece published in *The Wall Street Journal*, Brent Scowcroft, national security advisor to the

former President Bush, warned that "an attack on Iraq at this time would seriously jeopardize, if not destroy, the global counterterrorist campaign we have undertaken." Similarly, in an article in *The Washington Post*, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said that "military intervention should be attempted only if we are willing to sustain such an effort for however long it is needed."[18]

In the academic world, classical realists such as Robert Jervis, John Robert Mearsheimer, and Stephen Walt raised questions about the consequences of moving away from policies of containment and deterrence that had worked in the past and that, they felt, had more promise for the current situation.[19] Today, some of these experts fear that their concerns have become a reality. In a panel discussion at the Fletcher School, for example, Walt recently remarked that "the U.S. is now regarded with greater fear and suspicion, than any other time in our history," a development that has encouraged other states to begin to balance against us. Citing a 19th-century practitioner of realism, he went on to recall Prussian leader Otto von Bismarck's observation that "preventive war is committing suicide for fear of death."[20]

Other foreign policy analysts came to different conclusions. For example, one of America's leading scholars of foreign policy, Yale's John Lewis Gaddis, was cautiously optimistic. Citing the Bush plan as the "most sweeping shift in U.S. grand strategy since the beginning of the Cold War," he argued that much depended on how the world responded to it. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, he also argued that the current strategy of preemption was not really a radical departure and that the United States has responded with preemption at other times in its history when it was vulnerable. He called attention in particular to the British burning of Washington in 1814. In response to that attack, Gaddis recounts, John Quincy Adams, then secretary of state to James Monroe, developed a strategy of preemptive action in relation to the North

American continent as a way of preventing nonstate actors who, with or without state support, might gain footholds from which they could threaten the United States. Gaddis argues that Adams' "grand strategy" remained in effect throughout most of the 19th and 20th centuries and was only abandoned after World War II when the United States had a monopoly on nuclear weapons and the USSR became its new adversary. In his opinion, we have returned to a situation that is similar to that which 19th-century strategists had to contend with.[21]

Calculating the Costs

> Wars are costly undertakings.
>
> —William Hartung

Monetary Costs. In the first year alone, the direct costs to the United States of Operation Enduring Freedom, that is, the war in Afghanistan, are estimated to have been from $15 to $20 billion.[22] The costs to the United States of Operation Iraqi Freedom for the first 21 months (through December 2004) are estimated to have been as high as $128 billion. That does not include major maintenance, the replacement of destroyed equipment, and costs associated with the need to recruit more troops and retrain those deployed to Iraq. Through 2005, Anthony Cordesman estimates that the cost of military operations in the Iraq theater will be between $212 and $232 billion. By the end of 2007, he indicates they could be as high as $316 billion.[23] In defense of these costs, some observers have pointed out that, by historical standards, the United States is now devoting a smaller proportion (4%) of its gross national product to defense than in the Reagan years.[24] However, others have noted that with budget requests made in early 2005, the costs of the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and other efforts since the September 11, 2001, attacks have surged to $277 billion, a figure

that "exceeds the inflation-adjusted $200 billion cost of World War I and is approaching the $350 billion cost of the Korean War." The extent of these costs is increasingly raising concerns about the U.S. deficit, which reached as high as $412 billion in 2004.[25]

Costs in Lives. The United States, however, was not just spending its financial treasure. The war in Iraq was also costing lives. By the end of 2004, more than 1,300 members of the U.S. military had died in the war in Iraq.[26] Moreover, an independent organization, Iraq Body Count, estimated that between 14,284 and 16,419 Iraqi civilians had perished as a result of violence in the 18 months after the invasion.[27] Other estimates, based on household surveys by Johns Hopkins and Columbia University researchers working with Baghdad's Al-Mustansiriya University, put the excess Iraqi death toll as high as 98,000 in the same time period.[27]

Costs in Public Opinion. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were also becoming more costly in terms of public opinion. In October 2003, Carl Conetta pointed out that public opinion and, in particular, opinion in the Arab and Muslim world was at a 25-year low, making it difficult to build the cooperation necessary to fight terrorism.[29]

On May 1, 2003, President Bush had declared an end to major combat operations in Iraq, and he also declared "one victory in the war on terror that began on 9/11."[30] In a similar vein, Cofer Black, the Department of State's counterterrorism coordinator, stated that now al Qaeda would have to "put up or shut up. They had failed. It proves the Global War on Terrorism is effective."[31] Within weeks, however, suicide attacks in Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Israel, and Chechnya suggested a very different conclusion. Although White House claims that a new spate of insurgent attacks in Iraq only showed how "desperate" the adversary had become, the effectiveness and purpose of these measures was increasingly being called into question.

Wars begin when you want but don't end when you wish.
—Niccolo Machiavelli

In September 2003, almost two years after the removal of the Taliban in Afghanistan and four months after the fall of the Iraqi regime, London's International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) issued a report concluding that, notwithstanding al Qaeda's loss of its infrastructure in Afghanistan and the killing or capture of perhaps one third of its leadership, al Qaeda is "now reconstituted and doing business in a somewhat different manner, but more insidious and just as dangerous as in its pre-September 11 incarnation." In addition, it suggested that the West's "counterterrorism effort had perversely impelled an already highly decentralized and elusive transnational terrorist network to become even harder to identify and neutralize." Among other things, the destruction of its camps in Afghanistan meant that al Qaeda "no longer concentrated its forces in clusters discernible and targetable from the air," which in turn meant that the "lion's share of the counterterrorism burden rested on law enforcement and intelligence agencies."[32]

The end of 2003 saw the capture of Saddam Hussein and, although this event was proclaimed a victory by the U.S. administration, there was little reason for optimism. In late 2003, the U.S.-based Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) had reported that al Qaeda was training in the Russian Republic of Chechnya and had new ties in South America.[33] In the first six months of 2004, CSIS found that Islamist militancy and terrorism were spreading in Indonesia and in Central Asia, and it indicated that the March 11 bombings in Madrid showed a new level of sophistication.[34] CSIS also reported that al Qaeda had new operational bases in at least six countries including Kenya, Sudan, Pakistan, and Chechnya,[35] and the similarities between suicide bombings in predominantly Muslim Chechnya and Riyadh, Saudi

Arabia, led Vladmir Putin of Russia to conclude that they were conducted by the same organization.[36]

For the United States in the early part of 2004, the need for better intelligence became increasingly more urgent. This may explain why some soldiers and interrogators began to turn to more aggressive methods. In April 2004, allegations of torture and abuse of Iraqi detainees by U.S. soldiers at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison began to emerge, and for much of the rest of the spring and summer, what came to be known as the "Abu Ghraib prison scandal" dominated international headlines. Although the U.S. administration tried to play down the extent of torture and abuse, the release of photos showing the use of hoods, dogs, leashes, and sexual humiliation at Abu Ghraib rapidly became recruiting tools for opposition groups.

In May 2004, IISS declared that despite its post–September 11 losses, al Qaeda still had more than 18,000 potential terrorists operating in as many as 60 countries. During this period, the "postwar" Iraqi resistance was thought to be growing, from about 5,000 hardened fighters in mid-2003 to over 20,000 including as many as 1,000 foreign Islamic fighters who had infiltrated Iraqi territory.[37] By June, CSIS concluded that the U.S. government claim in early 2004 that two thirds of the al Qaeda leadership had been eliminated "now seems like poor consolation as a new generation of terrorists is emerging in Iraq and around the globe."[38] For many, the catalyst was Abu Ghraib. However, interviews of foreign fighters later caught in Iraq indicated that images of abuse at the detention center at Guantanamo Bay also inspired a willingness to fight.[39]

By late 2004, there was a growing perception that the Iraqi insurgency was becoming, in the words of U.S. Central Command Lieutenant General Lance Smith, "more effective: they may use doorbells today to blow things up. They may use remote controls

from toys tomorrow. And as we adapt, they adapt."[40] In July, CSIS had reported evidence that Osama bin Laden was now focusing his efforts on Nigeria and West Africa. There was also evidence of renewed enthusiasm for al Qaeda in Yemen, where cooperation with the United States in the War on Terror had incited Muslim radicals, and in the summer of 2004, Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigade was known to have posted an announcement making reference to their desire to turn Yemen into another battleground for U.S. forces:

> Our goals in the next phase: expanding the circle of conflict by spreading operations all around the world. (We will) drag America into a third swamp - after Iraq and Afghanistan - and let it be Yemen, God willing.[41]

For some, the "clash of civilizations" envisaged as early as 1993 by Harvard's Samuel P. Huntington appeared to be becoming a reality.[42] By mid-2004, Brookings scholar P.W. Singer observed that

> While the United States and its allies have seized a portion of al Qaeda lieutenants and assets, the organization remains vibrant, its senior leadership is largely intact, its popularity greater than ever, its ability to recruit unbroken, and its ideology and funds spreading across a global network present in places ranging from Algeria and Belgium to Indonesia and Iraq. Of greatest concern, its potential to strike at American citizens and interests both at home and abroad continues.[43]

Singer went on to express concern that "at a broader level, the United States and the wider Islamic world stand at a point of historic and dangerous crisis."[44] There was no question that support for the United States had decreased in the Arab world. As early as June 2003, a Pew survey of individuals in Muslim countries found that favorable opinions of the United States were present in only 4% of the population in Saudi Arabia, in 6% in Morocco and Jordan, and in 13% in Egypt. Similar patterns held across the rest

of the Muslim world, from Indonesia to Pakistan.[45] A year after the invasion of Iraq, Pew polls indicated that anger toward the United States was still pervasive in Muslim countries and opposition to the war almost universal. Moreover, Osama bin Laden was viewed favorably by large percentages in Pakistan (65%), Jordan (55%), and Morocco (45%). [46]

Perhaps most important, what the United States had described as a preemptive "war on terrorism" was becoming broadly interpreted as "a war on Islam." As a result, Singer claimed, "relations between the world's dominant state power and the world's community of over 1.4 billion Muslim believers stand at question." [47]

DECISIONS WITHOUT DATA?

Still, the big picture was not clear. As indicated in an October 2003 memo, even U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had questions:

> Today, we lack metrics to know if we are winning or losing the global war on terror. Are we capturing, killing, or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the *madrassas* and the radical clerics are recruiting, training, and deploying against us?

> Does the U.S. need to fashion a broad, integrated plan to stop the next generation of terrorists? The U.S. is putting relatively little effort into a long-range plan, but we are putting a great deal of effort into trying to stop terrorists. The cost-benefit ratio is against us! Our cost is billions against the terrorists' costs of millions… . Is our current situation such that 'the harder we work, the behinder we get'?[48]

Some observers took these questions to mean that the administration was making decisions without adequate data. Princeton economist Alan Krueger and Stanford political scientist David Laitin, for example, declared that

> The statement was a stinging acknowledgment that the government lacks both classified and unclassified data to make critical policy decisions. It is also a reminder that only accurate information, presented without political spin, can help the public and decision-makers know where the United States stands in the war on terrorism and how best to fight it.[49]

Jeffrey Record of the Center for International Strategy, Technology and Policy (CISTP) observes that traditional wars provided "clear standards of measuring success in the form of territory gained and enemy forces destroyed or otherwise removed from combat." He argues that these standards, however, were always of "limited utility against irregular enemies that fought to different standards of success, and they are of almost no use in gauging success against a terrorist threat like al Qaeda."[50] As he points out, citing Bruce Hoffman, terrorists "do not function in the open as armed units, generally do not attempt to seize or hold territory, deliberately avoid engaging enemy military forces in combat and rarely exercise any direct control or sovereignty over either territory or population."[51] Moreover, "al Qaeda has demonstrated impressive regenerative powers," in part because, as Daniel Byman points out, it is

> not just a distinct terrorist organization: it is a movement that seeks to inspire and coordinate other groups and individuals.
>
> Even if al Qaeda is taking losses beyond its ability to recuperate, there is still a much broader Islamist movement that is hostile to the United States, seeks to overthrow U.S. allies and is committed to mass casualty terrorist violence. … The conceptual key is this: al Qaeda is not a single terrorist group but a global insurgency.[52]

Record concludes that against such an enemy, "tallies of dead and captured are problematic" although the capture of al Qaeda

leaders may contribute to success by "removing dangerous operatives from circulation and providing new sources of intelligence on al Qaeda."[53]

DEMANDS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Nonetheless, by the end of 2004, there was an increasing demand for accountability and measurement of results. The problem of accountability became a special focus in January when, in a confirmation hearing for Secretary of State, National Security Advisor Dr. Condoleeza Rice was asked to comment specifically on this matter by Senator Feingold:

> I'd like to have you say a little bit about how do we measure success—not a list of things we've done, but how do we measure how well the terrorists are doing? How do we know whether they're picking up steam in terms of picking up recruits and gathering more help around the world or not? How do we measure this thing?[54]

Condoleeza Rice, who was confirmed but with senators objecting, made it clear that our ability to measure "this thing" is imperfect. She added,

> One of the hardest things about this is this is a very shadowy network whose numbers are hard to count. It's important and difficult to know what is a hard-core terrorist who's committed to the jihad and would never be reformable in any way versus somebody who might just be attracted to the philosophy because they're jobless or hopeless, or whatever, and might be brought back into the fold. That's the kind of important question for which we, frankly, don't have a measurement, and I don't think we're going to. I think we're going to see this in broader strokes.[55]

The issue of measurement became, if possible, more heated in April 2005 when the State Department discovered that the

number of international terrorist incidents had increased in 2004 and announced that it was stripping its congressionally mandated Annual Report on Terrorism of all terrorism-related statistics for that year.[56] The previous April, the State Department retracted its annual report because it understated the number of incidents for 2003. This new move met with considerable criticism. In particular, there was "concern that the move was designed to shield the government from questions about the success of its effort to combat terrorism by eliminating what amounted to the only year-to-year benchmark of progress." Within days, the administration did release the data through the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) but urged reporters not to compare the numbers for 2004 with those for earlier years because, it claimed, the criteria for counting had changed.[57] This recommendation also met with considerable criticism. "Inevitably there are some judgment calls that go into deciding what is a terrorist event," said Princeton economist Alan Krueger, "but it is astonishing to me that three years into the 'war on terrorism' there is not more interest by the administration in keeping track of terrorist incidents." Others voiced concern about the implications of the State Department abandoning its report. "How can we hold ourselves accountable for achieving benchmarks of progress in this struggle," asked Senator Russell Feingold (D-Wis.), "if we have no clear idea of what exactly it is that would constitute success?"[58]