

Public Diplomacy's Next Challenge

Christopher C. Harmon *

Abstract

Despite seven years of experiments, U.S. public diplomacy against international terrorism has largely failed. What is most needed is a strong infusion of fresh ideas. The rhetorical branch of the offensive against terror has been utterly neglected. U.S. spokesmen should re-open the argument about terrorism's rank immorality; amplify the voices of Muslim critics of terrorism; publicly deconstruct the ideas of outspoken terrorists; and point to such weaknesses as their lack of credentials in theology. Secondly, there is much room for vigorous and thoughtful defense of evident political alternatives to terror, especially moderation and the rule of law.

Keywords: public diplomacy; diplomacy; counterterrorism; battle of ideas; State Department; CIST (Countering Ideological Support for Terrorism).

Introduction

Any American can be pleased by certain successes wrought during the past seven hard years of global effort against terrorism. One of the many bright spots is the total success that has been achieved in homeland defense—there has not been a single Al Qaeda attack on American soil since September 2001. Another is the coalition's destruction of the Taliban's grip on power in Afghanistan, followed by the provision of help to indigenous Afghan leaders such as Hamid Karzai, who now have the chance to determine their homeland's future.

But there is one respect in which United States has clearly failed: public diplomacy. At the end of October 2007, when Karen Hughes announced she would step down as head of the United States' efforts in public diplomacy, she had served longer, but not notably more successfully, than her two predecessors in that vital State Department role. Charlotte Beers, and then Margaret Tutwiler, had resigned after struggling in the position, which leads not just the State Department's efforts but also those of other U.S. agencies and departments. If the National Security Council was exercising good guidance in this arena, the general public could not tell it, nor could the Washington policy community feel it. Skilled observers, such as scholars at the Washington-based Institute of World Politics, and its President, John Lenczowski, found little to recommend in U.S. national efforts at public diplomacy; they became increasingly critical as the "locust years" of two presidential terms slipped past, and meetings with executive branch principals seemed to go nowhere.

By 2005 and 2006, what had been a serious inter-governmental problem became an unattractive open secret: U.S. strategies in public diplomacy were not reaching their audiences, even though the budget for such efforts kept rising. Hundreds of millions of new dollars were proving to be no substitute for imagination and skill and fighting spirit and an

* Dr. Christopher C. Harmon is the author of *Terrorism Today*, released in a second edition by Routledge/Taylor and Francis in October 2007.

informed understanding of foreign audiences. As the Pew Research Center was releasing its newest figures on foreign views of the U.S., which showed mostly declines rather than gains in foreign support, the key policy professional responsible for this endeavor announced her intent to leave as Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.

It makes for a painful moment for the U.S. and its friends. More important is the question we now face: Have we learned anything? And if so, what? Have opponents of terrorism arrived at the best kinds of arguments to reach the foreign public? Is there a good working partnership between the State Department—which surely must take the lead in this area—and the Defense Department, which has too often inherited challenges its practitioners are not trained to carry out readily? Does the U.S. government need a new structure, rather than new money, to make progress? Have Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s adjustments made to date—such as transferring some diplomats from Europe to the Third World—made a dent in this sizeable problem? This article is a narrower, more modest effort to contribute to a reevaluation of U.S. efforts; its chief contribution is to suggest several lines of argument that have been neglected but which would have good effect. Some of what follows may be controversial. Yet, in my judgment, the pained care the U.S. has been taking to *avoid* controversy is one of the very reasons Washington is doing so poorly in the struggle for non-U.S. “votes.”

We begin with the global problem: Al Qaeda and its allies in the fierce underworld of Islamic terrorism. It is there, in the Militant Muslim International, and not in Washington, that the argument began. In the training manual discovered in Manchester, England, in the late 1990s—a time when few to none in the U.S. executive branch believed a war was looming—Al Qaeda’s writers laid out their challenge. The opening page of *Military Studies in the Jihad against the Tyrants* (colloquially known as the “Manchester Manual”) goes beyond clarity to full nakedness in its intentions to strike at existing Muslim governments and their detested allies, which of course include all NATO countries:

The confrontation that we are calling for with the apostate regimes does not know Socratic debates ... Platonic ideals ... nor Aristotelian diplomacy. But it knows the dialogue of bullets, the ideals of assassination, bombing, and destruction, and the diplomacy of the cannon and machine-gun.

Islamic governments have never and will never be established through peaceful solutions and cooperative councils. They are established as they [always] have been by pen and gun

by word and bullet

by tongue and teeth.¹

Three propositions follow from the study of such Al Qaeda declarations and actions. First, the world—rather than the United States, or Washington, or George Bush—has a profound problem. The attacks of 11 September 2001 prompted the United Nations Security Council to declare flatly that an act of international terrorism is “a threat to international peace and security.” The last four of these words are famous “trigger language” for

¹ *Military Studies in the Jihad Against the Tyrants*: The Al-Qaeda Training Manual [n.d.], ed. Jerrold M. Post (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: USAF Counterproliferation Center, Aug. 2004), 13.

actions under the UN Charter. Now terrorism is seen as a threat to such peace and security, and the Security Council is “determined to combat by all means” such threats (UNSCR 1368 of 2001).²

Our second proposition, in 2008, is about whom we are trying to reach. Our conversation is with partners and allies and friends, in and out of government. That is, the “audiences” for our public and official diplomatic efforts are peoples and governments of the world who are open to conversation. While these are especially Muslims and Arabs, the audiences include American citizens, and voters and citizens in regimes, democratic or not, which are under attack by extremists.

The third proposition follows, and returns us to the first: while billions of ears may be open and listening, those of Al Qaeda and its sort are closed. Their tapes do aim at the wider world, but their calculations and deliberations are only with one another. They mock “dialogue,” and bare their hatred for reasoned discussion and democratic debate over public affairs. The Al Qaeda network’s leaders can be subtle and skilled; they show excellent understanding of their Western enemies; but they cannot be convinced. Negotiations would prove fruitless. The hard Al Qaeda men can only be arrested or killed. Our parleys, our arguments, our extended hands, are for others, not them.

A Proper Posture

It is important to begin our advance in the right posture. A new approach to public diplomacy requires offensive components, not only defensive. Washington should continue its arguments defending itself against the rhetoric of terror, which deny interest in a “war of civilizations” and point instead to such ideals as society, morality, rule of law, moderation, and democracy. These are indeed ideals, and worthy ones, and all are assaulted by any act of international terrorism. But Washington must also take the offensive against terrorism’s perpetrators, spokesmen, theoreticians, and apologists. George W. Bush has been willing to take rhetorical risks; most others in the executive branch have been standing behind him but speaking less strongly. Some may regard the current U.S. president as inarticulate, but no other person in this administration has matched the qualities of his speech to the joint session of Congress (and the world) on 20 September 2001. Subsequent years slipped by. Wonderful opportunities for powerful prose were lost by subordinates who instead mustered mild, unconvincing, unquotable thoughts. There is a paradox: Washington, D.C. is known for legions with diplomatic training and experience and remarkable IQs, yet most officials have practiced overly-mild or even weak defenses of the U.S. against the rhetoric of terror, if they spoke at all. Rhetoricians have simply lacked—or decided to forego—the offensive strategy.³

² United Nations Charter, Art. 39. Text of Security Council Resolution 1368, accessed on 6 November 2007 at www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2001/SC7143.doc.htm. Charter language frequently speaks of the need to “maintain” international peace and security, and Art. 39 is one of the more direct passages in identifying the Security Council’s duty to act when a breach of the peace occurs.

³ Even the admirable Robert Satloff, who has written well and frequently in efforts to redirect U.S. public diplomacy, has few to no suggestions for an *offensive* in his latest essay, “How To Win the War of Ideas,” *Washington Post* (10 November 2007).

New Rhetorical Approaches to Anti-Terrorism

What is needed—more than money—are fresh arguments, arguments delivered with reason, imagination, discretion, and persistence. “Persistence” means saying the right things more than once. This is a consideration that is not to be neglected; all the observers say this is “a long war,” and it takes persistence to win a long struggle, and especially to change world opinion. A further thought about our public posture is that the most helpful voices will be the non-U.S. voices. Non-governmental voices are helpful; non-American voices are even better.⁴ Mr. Bush may say true things with force, but he is only one man, and a man with low approval ratings. Secretary Rice’s voice is clear and weighty, and could enunciate new and worthy arguments, but she is one over-worked person, closely identified with President Bush. We need such spokesmen, but we have a far greater need for non-U.S. voices in this global conversation. Their perspectives, their new forms of argument, and their unique styles of speech can reach some of those we are missing.

Five categories of arguments now follow, offering suggestions for spokespersons foreign or domestic. All address essential elements in the ideological struggle with terrorists and their opinions. Each of the five sets of viewpoints is but a sketch, which can and should be elaborated, and painted, in creative and realistic ways by partisans of the good and the sensible and the sane. And I would appreciate nothing more than seeing others add and bring to life their own new arguments.

Terrorism is Essentially Murder

The most fundamental thing—the thing many sophisticated people with public careers seem unwilling to say baldly—is that the essence of terrorism is murderous. Why is it that, a full generation after the intrusion of this crude phenomenon into international relations, academics are still penning extended articles on the impossibility of defining terrorism, and experts commenting for the news still mock the word “terrorism” as a mere epithet?⁵ In the social sciences today, one hears much of a book that examined 109 definitions of terrorism; the conclusion, we are told, is that the phenomenon is undefinable. In fact, Alex

⁴ A State Department essay on public diplomacy published in 2007 clearly recognizes the value of diverse voices and non-governmental ones. But it seems to neglect the great desirability of non-American voices in this discussion. And it almost neglects the focus I have given in this essay: as polls slide, what new arguments can be made to attract favorable foreign attention? The majority of the essay is about process, functions, and budgets, which are necessary but not sufficient. Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, “The Struggle of Ideas in the Islamic World,” in *Country Reports on Terrorism: 2006* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, April 2007), 194–97. These annuals—occasionally criticized—are highly important works for many reasons, and remain highly valuable resources for years after publication.

⁵ For example, a new and very useful volume of terrorism-related documents is introduced with the old and “safe” statement that “...one person’s terrorist is often another person’s freedom fighter.” Those words are not fact but mere relativism, repeated on the next page also. The editors seem to adopt this position in the belief that it resists corruptive “value judgments”; but one could reply that the posture abandons or repudiates any search for moral truth about the phenomenon, their chosen subject. Omer Elagab and Jeehaan Elagab, *International Law Documents Relating to Terrorism*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge-Cavendish, 2007), xxv.

Schmid's useful 1983 tome *Political Terrorism* displays how most definitions include common elements, especially violence and threats; victims who are not the real targets; and acts that are purposeful, political, and psychological.⁶

Academic experts on terrorism have usually failed to help in public diplomacy. They dwell upon the "gray" areas of terrorism's definition. The net result, conference after seminar after colloquium, is a general abolition of black and white. But if terrorism always includes some grays, black still exists, and so does white. If reason can never give us ownership of the truth, it can bring us closer to truth. Terrorism is definable and real. It is not conventional war, which requires belligerents on each side, not surprise attack upon non-belligerents. Terrorism is not self-defense: that is a right and duty which peoples, subnational groups, and states possess and protect every day, normally without recourse to terrorism. Terrorism is also not liberation, and equating it with the legitimate right to overthrow tyrants and despots is political obscenity, not political reasoning. And it is not collateral damage, either; terrorism explicitly targets the innocent for shock value, whereas legitimate belligerents try to kill other belligerents, erring occasionally and, we hope, with deep regret, and with the possibility of war crimes charges in egregious cases.

Terrorism was best defined, in 1979, as "the deliberate, systematic murder, maiming, and menacing of the innocent to inspire fear for political ends."⁷ Another very good definition has long been in use by the U.S. Department of State and is set into law in the U.S. Code.⁸ And there is a perfectly adequate new definition used by the United Nations in its treaty that came into force in 2002 on suppressing terrorist financing: terrorism is an act "intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to a civilian, or to any other person not taking an active part in the hostilities in a situation of armed conflict, when the purpose of such act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act."⁹ Any definition can cause a lawyers' quarrel, yet any of these three will serve us sufficiently well in public deliberations on policy. The U.S. public officials who now seem ill at ease or outright embarrassed by the question "How do you define terrorism?" could start, tomorrow, carrying a slim card in a breast pocket with the UN treaty's definition. Merely reading it aloud will surprise most auditors, since even specialists think the UN has always failed to define terrorism. And it will instruct the others, allowing for the beginnings of a better public conversation.

Terror is Increasingly Repudiated World-Wide

A second set of arguments should take shape at this point: Terrorism is more and more repudiated by the international community. This is progress; this is an advantage in argu-

⁶ Alex P. Schmid, *Political Terrorism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1983). This article makes an unconventional use of this book.

⁷ Adopted by the Jonathan Institute in a 1979 conference.

⁸ The Department of State uses a definition in U.S. Code (Title 22): "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents."

⁹ International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, Art. 2 (1) (b). The treaty passage may be found in Elagab and Elagab, *International Law Documents Relating to Terrorism*, 476, or at <http://untreaty.un.org/English/notpubl/18-11e.htm>.

ments against terrorists’ proclaimed “right” to kill with impunity, no matter how obscure or twisted the cause. This is a point that, if not outright sunny, at least represents a break in the clouds.

Six decades ago, world representatives met at Geneva and laid down bedrock language that aimed to protect prisoners of war. The careful words of their four conventions also delegitimize many violent sub-state groups of today, such as terrorists. The Geneva Conventions made clear that authentic martial forces in a legitimate state of war follow four minimum standards. The force must: be under the command of a person responsible for his subordinates; have a fixed distinctive sign or uniform; carry arms openly; and conduct operations according to the laws of war. A 1977 protocol—which some states have declined to sign—may relax by degrees the mandates for fixed emblems and open carrying of arms. But the new protocol underscores the requirement that all combatants distinguish themselves from civilians and comply with international laws of war. Article 51 prohibits “acts or threats of violence the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population....”¹⁰ Yet how few public speakers, U.S. or foreign, ever even reference Geneva Convention standards when discussing today’s terrorists? An airing on occasion would notably aid in a defense of law, as against the less rational, unilateral postulates of terrorists, their video artists, and their public apologists.

Another much-neglected point for the counter-terrorism side lies in actions of the United Nations of late. There is more than the aforementioned UN definition of terrorism that serves the treaty of 2002. The Security Council has again and again taken up the matter of international terrorism, often with good results. Sanctions have been laid down against the Taliban and Al Qaeda; general financial sanctions have been decided upon and ordered, applicable for all states; and a UN committee has been created to monitor the progress. After decades of neglecting terrorism—or even passing General Assembly resolutions that are encouraging to some violent groups—the United Nations has begun to take stands on some issues related to terrorism. The Security Council’s sanctions against these terrorists, as well as against the states of Libya and the Sudan, have had good effect.¹¹

¹⁰ In addition to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, I have consulted Canadian scholar L. C. Green’s *The Contemporary Law of Armed Conflict* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993, repr. 1996), 107–11, and two attorneys: U.S. Navy Capt. Dean Dwigins and Laura R. Harmon. However, my text only represents my best judgment. The new protocol is intended to benefit legitimate, territorially-based national liberation movements fighting foreign occupation. It may well soften the bedrock Geneva strictures in limited ways, indicated above, but the same protocol obliges compliance with laws of war; bars feigning civilian status; bans indiscriminate attacks; protects civilians and “civilian objects”; bars taking hostages; and underscores the requirement of commanders to keep their personnel from violating the laws of war. All these are and should be inhibitions on terrorists and their usual tactics. “1977 Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions....,” in *Terrorism in War: The Law of War Crimes*, ed. Howard S. Levie, Vol. 3, Second Series, in *Terrorism: Documents of International & Local Control* (n.p.: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1993), 611–24.

¹¹ New UN actions are mentioned in the State Department’s annual *Country Reports on Terrorism*, and many are also discussed in Chapter 5 of my *Terrorism Today*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007).

They should be studied, and improved upon for deployment against two other long and flagrant state sponsors of terrorism, Syria and Iran.

INTERPOL is itself one more indicator of gradual limited progress. The Lyon-based International Criminal Police Organization for decades shied away from “terrorism” cases. This was because such cases come with political perils. States often claim “political exception” for certain kinds of crime; the U.S. often did so in the past, and some states still do. But the new U.N. treaty on terrorist financing bars such “political exceptions.” And INTERPOL has been active. During recent years, the agency has shown an increasing willingness to put its bright international spotlight on fugitives who commit mass murder, regardless of their political motives. They may publish a “red notice” on someone. Such a notice does not allow for arrest—INTERPOL has never had such powers—but the effects can be considerable. Intelligence agencies fix on the new information. Terrorists’ travel is inhibited dramatically. Public attention can shame governments that protect or encourage the named killer and his organization. Late in 2007, INTERPOL issued notices against named Iranian and Lebanese Shiites for their roles in a 1994 bombing case in Argentina against a Jewish cultural center. Even if courts do not convict all the defendants, the charges are valuable politically and serve as a warning to state sponsors of terror.

There are Obvious, Good Alternatives to Terror

A third set of arguments to be offered via public diplomacy has to do with better displaying the practical alternatives to terrorist politics. Moderation in politics and the rule of law are defended well at certain moments by some U.S. spokesmen, but our position would be dramatically improved by better arguments, especially if they are made abroad. We would do well to hear more from the hostages saved from terrorists, from those wounded by terrorists (their cases are never given the publicity that deaths are), from the victims’ family advocates and priests and imams and friends, and from all religious and political figures responsible for citizens’ safety. These arguments would not inhibit hardened terrorists. The arguments are aimed at the thinking citizen, the moderate academic or politician, the religious mentors of the community, the civic organizations, the women’s group, the security professional.

Terrorism’s apologists say, with numbing consistency, that “terrorism is the natural weapon of the weak,” and that terrorists “have no alternatives.” A student of political science or history must disagree. Known alternatives to terrorism include clandestine political organization. There is the hunt for external allies, who are often available in our globalized world. There are media organs to approach. There are in fact numerous political, economic, and social alternatives to the murder, maiming, and menacing of the innocent for political purposes. The French Resistance found many between 1940 and 1945, even in facing the Nazis, who had a formidable oppressive apparatus. The French underground did not, for example, kidnap and torture the daughters and wives of top Nazi officials to make them leave France. They did not poison a local town’s water supply because the act would also sicken a German garrison. They certainly did shoot *Wehrmacht* soldiers—and paid the price when caught. They had the courage and stamina to live for years in the underground. Modern politics knows scores of ideological groups that fight for causes with good means; consider the success of the Zapatistas of Mexico, who carried out terrorist attacks for only a few weeks before refining their approach for all subsequent years.

Moderate politics requires consensus and the protection of all. There may be a right to revolution, or to re-make the political order, but there can be no right to terrorism. Terrorism claims special minority rights, but at the expense of innocent victims in the rest of the population. Terrorists often demand to know “why the state should have a monopoly on violence.” But their own logical end is anarchy, violent anarchy.

Look more closely at how a reasonable world community might receive and address a terrorist minority’s claim of “a right to kill.” Does any minority have such a right? Does it reside with an ethnic or religious group within a larger country? Does it apply to a smaller minority within that state, or even a tiny but highly self-conscious “victimized” group? Is a political party losing at the polls entitled to turn to terrorism? If so, how about a single cell that does not even dare to compete in elections? Continue on. May an individual with a high-minded object—a Jew such as Yigal Amir (who shot Yitzhak Rabin), or a Palestinian such as Sirhan Sirhan (who shot Robert F. Kennedy)—murder to advertise for a change in Middle East policy? The pathway of thought descends to inevitable, ever-darker conclusions. The terrorist’s argument to a special and lethal right is a *reductio ad absurdum*, with anarchy its certain end.

The rule of law is another evident alternative to the terrorist’s narrower view of political options. Often mentioned yet little explored by our public spokesmen, the “rule of law” is a powerful concept. It can favor change, or it can favor stability, but it always favors equality and reason and justice. The principles embedded in these three short words “rule of law” are that law is made by the people; that no one is above the law; that there is equality within the law; that no crime is beyond the reach of the law; and that a culture of civil piety, or respect for law, is vital. Plato taught this. Abraham Lincoln re-taught it. Winston Churchill explained it to democrats emerging in fascist Italy in a wonderful official letter of August 1944, which historian Martin Gilbert has saved from obscurity. The English parliamentarian spoke of free expression, the right to criticize the government of the day, constitutional means to make popular will apparent, courts free of violence and party rule, the rights of the individual, etc. And of course there are elections. As Churchill said on another occasion, in words that free Iraqis with purple thumbs would understand: “At the bottom of all the tributes paid to democracy is the little man, walking into the little booth, with a little pencil, making a little cross on a little bit of paper....”¹²

Improving the Defense

To advance the anti-terrorist idea, there must be more imaginative, more proficient defenses that directly address terrorism. The following options might help. If not, several of them may suggest variants of arguments, to be made by other partisans of liberty and sanity, for themselves and in their own ways.

Democracies—not just in Europe, but in both hemispheres—observe principles protecting freedom of religion, not religious war. This is said now; it must be said from time to time again, with new emphasis and different words. This high ground is the most defensible. For several reasons, there can be no political “traction” to be found in the different

¹² Churchill’s letter of 28 August 1944 is cited in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, Vol. 7: *Road to Victory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 918. The second quotation is from a Churchill speech of two months later, delivered on 31 October 1944.

argument that “Islam is inherently militant.” We hardly need to pause, reading such words, to ask whether that argument is at all true; making the argument would be worse than useless in its effects. America’s six or seven million followers of Islam would rightly be the first to be insulted, closely followed by generous-minded non-Muslim citizens of the U.S. and other democracies, whose numbers easily surpass a billion souls. We do not wish to alienate Muslim friends and neutrals. We want no war with Islam – far from it. We stand against the poisoning of religion by terrorism and violence, including the forcible or direct exclusion of any religion from those available to mankind.

Democracies, though often charged with hypocrisy, are in fact usually embarrassed by their “own” terrorists. They should be. And they should admit this to the world – it is a healthy exercise for the Muslim world to see, and it shows that we do not conflate terrorism with Islam. What is our typical democratically-minded man’s position when confronted by news of an assassination? It is not pride. Yigal Amir is a public figure, but how many Jews praise him, or his assassination of former Prime Minister Rabin in 1995? American democrats who are Christians are embarrassed by “their” terrorists, including “Christian Identity,” the odd sect in which preachers avow that God made the white race to be superior. Timothy McVeigh was allegedly attracted to this vein of thought when he blew up the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. But normal Christians do not whisper approving thoughts of his action or his “leadership.” One can deduce that even the right-wing extremists who had incited hatred of the federal government were appalled by McVeigh’s truck bomb. Christians in the U.S. are also embarrassed by Eric Rudolph, whose bombs were aimed at abortionists and homosexuals. So while the U.S. is largely and nominally Christian, the U.S. also tries and locks up terrorists who imagine themselves to be warriors for Christ.¹³

Democracies have stood up for Muslim rights; that is another proposition worth defending. Women and men from the ranks of American volunteers have taken their professional military skills abroad many times and fought to defend people whose faith is based on the Koran. This happened in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and again starting in late 2001. It happened in Somalia, in Bosnia, and in Kosovo. A skillful former U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia, Paul Wolfowitz, frequently made this argument. It was good, enough so that it later grew too familiar to hold much interest. Now, it has had a rest and could be put to use again.¹⁴ Washington is in need of gifted foreign volunteers to study and speak out on this matter of “Christian democracies defending Muslim populations.”

The coalition of NATO, other democracies, and moderate Muslim states is making war today on Al Qaeda, not upon Islam. It was Al Qaeda that made the war. For the U.S., this began with a long flaming message in 1996, though virtually no one noticed,¹⁵ and then again with the *fatwa* of February 1998, which a few more noticed, and again in August

¹³ The U.S. also locks up many Cuban-Americans who avow high-minded reasons for their attacks on Cuba. They are often jailed under the Neutrality Acts of the late 1930s, or other laws. Cuba presently charges that the U.S. is failing in its duty in not extraditing a Venezuelan named Luis Posada Carriles, accused of a horrific airline bombing against Cuban interests in 1976. But the suspect is in fact in jail in the U.S., even if extradition seems unlikely.

¹⁴ This refers to returning to public light the kind of argument Dr. Wolfowitz made.

¹⁵ I must include myself among those who missed the important 1996 propaganda by Al Qaeda.

1998 when two U.S. Embassies were destroyed, which many found surprising, and then a fourth time in 2001, which everybody in the world noticed. President Bush and his senior spokesmen have rightly and repeatedly said this series of attacks is the cause of war, and that the United States is not at war with Islam. It would make a memorable quip for some future press conference if a U.S. spokesperson had handy the number of such formal public statements deprecating the idea of war with Islam. Computer search results would yield an answer in the hundreds, if not low thousands. This is a good argument, and Washington has made it often. What we need now are others to make it for us in their own words. There is also one change needed in the rhetoric of anti-terrorism: spokesmen should quote more from Al Qaeda declarations. The terrorists hand us the most self-incriminating evidence imaginable on this question of who wants a war of religions or civilizations.¹⁶

States have not just the right but also the duty to resist international terrorists. Principle and prudence, as well as UN Security Council Resolutions, say this is true, for all states. Yet it is a note starkly absent from the U.S. orchestral score of the past five or six years. It is plain that if a state has rights *against* transnational attack, this means it also has a sovereign *duty* to inhibit such attacks, and bar the presence of terrorists. How empty it is for a Havana of 1980, or a Tehran of 2008, to loudly talk of its own sovereign right to inviolability of territory when the same state serves as an infamous platform for militants to range abroad, coming home when they are in need of rest and rearmament. Traditional international law was always clear on this point. The Geneva Conventions added language against abuses of humanity during war, positing an “obligation to search for persons alleged to have committed, or to have ordered to be committed, such grave breaches, and ... bring such persons, regardless of their nationality, before its own courts.”¹⁷ Modern terrorists should be declared enemies of all humanity, *hostis humanis generis*, as were pirates and others described in the eighteenth century by Emer de Vattel. That contributor to international law said that crimes against humanity imply universal jurisdiction; all responsible states should act against such persons.

An important modern document, agreed to by all states, declares that the inherent dignity of human beings is sufficient cause to protect them, and that they deserve “freedom from fear.” Since “terrorism” works by frightening multitudes, to eke out a political purpose of some sort, these three words of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights deserve mention in our public discourse.¹⁸ Yet who has heard the phrase so used? Terrorists would smile over such a quotation, or mock such “Platonic ideals,” but they are unimportant here. Our audiences in the discussion are the states, and peoples, who signed the UN Charter – they are sworn to live up to it. These three words from the Preamble of the Declaration are in theory enough to practically prevent the General Assembly

¹⁶ Consider, for example, *His Own Words: A Translation of the Writings of Dr. Ayman al Zawahiri*, ed. and trans. by Laura Mansfield (n.p.: TLG Publications, 2006).

¹⁷ From Article 49 of the first of the treaties, the “1949 Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field,” in Levie, ed., *Terrorism in War*, 590.

¹⁸ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” adopted by the UN General Assembly in Resolution 217 A (III) on 10 December 1948; available at www.un.org/Overview/rights.html.

from endorsing or indulging a violent group that violates the laws of war or practices international terrorism.

Women have natural rights, explicitly protected under the UN Charter. Some infamous groups reliant upon terrorism, such as the Taliban, distort Islam to deny women their liberty and equality. That being so, women deserve a proper defense. Their rights must be better explained to closed societies. Abuses of women's rights should be highlighted. When abuses are chronic and obscene, they become the basis for international action. We have here a potent political issue, although it must be handled carefully, given the prospect of upsetting or alienating some Muslim males. But there are proper ways to make the argument forcibly. And there is an interested audience: women. Even small success in our arguments may serve to coax some of these auditors—who, after all, represent half the world's Muslims—toward the counter-terrorist position. A few American women made good public critics of the Taliban's hurling acid at the uncovered faces or ankles of Afghan ladies. We would do well to amplify the strong voice of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali Muslim who served in Holland's parliament. She had the courage to participate in making a film with Theo van Gogh, and later that director's stabbed body was found with a note denouncing her as the next target. Ms. Ali says, with an authority most Washingtonians cannot, that the World Trade Center attacks were not about poverty and colonialism, they were about hoping for "a one way ticket to Heaven."¹⁹

Taking the Rhetorical Offensive

It has not been enough for Washington and its allies to make a tepid defense (or even a good one) of Western values against the rhetoric of terror. Public diplomacy must also have the fortitude to make direct arguments against the terrorists. By their actions, terrorists place their personal and political qualities and viewpoints on display. Yet for too long our public spokesmen have shied away from attacking them on these grounds. The reason might be fear, physical or moral. More likely, it is reserve, grounded in the judgment that to take the offensive is counterproductive. That is in fact what some U.S. experts on Islam say, that "Christians have no authority in this argument," and so even our experts on Islam usually forgo taking the argument on the offensive. But that is no answer to an immense problem. Playing defense for years has certainly failed; perhaps six months of well-placed offensive arguments are exactly what would be most productive now.

One promising and neglected line of argument requires no religious credentials to make – it is a simple statement of fact, akin to a businessman checking on whether the job applicant in front of him actually is a college graduate or not. Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri utterly lack the religious credentials required for issuing *fatwas*. They did not attend religious seminaries, let alone graduate. Neither has made the elaborate professional commitment to theology and its study that an imam or mullah would. They may call themselves leaders, or even emirs. But it is hardly possible that anything they write should

¹⁹ *The Times* (London), 3 October 2007, discussing her book *Infidel*. Others who say some contemporary terrorists act for the right to gain heaven, and dream of young virgins, include two from an Afghan family tied to violence, interviewed by CBS News for "60 Minutes," broadcast on 18 November 2007. The reader will please note that these citations are to individual Muslims' views of the motives of Muslim terrorists.

be called a *fatwa* by a thinking person. And yet, when have we heard a top U.S. official say so?

Second, terrorists who say they are Muslims are killing thousands of Muslims. For years this has been true, yet for years it was not allowed into speechwriters' hands.²⁰ By itself, the tragically indiscriminate Algerian civil war of the 1990s, commenced by the Front for Islamic Salvation and the Armed Islamic Group, makes it apparent that the largest recent butchers' bills from North Africa came from Muslims clashing with Muslims. Consider typical Hamas or Hezbollah car bombings, which catch in the blast Arabs or Muslim as often as Jews or "Crusaders." It is Fatah's gunmen, mostly Muslims, who spent 2007 warring with Hamas in Palestinian streets and buildings. It is Kurdish Muslims who shoot at Turkish soldiers. At last, the September 2006 White House "National Strategy for Combating Terrorism" put this down on record; it did so in one line of an excellent document, one which few Americans or foreigners have read.²¹ What is badly needed, even now after all these lost years, is a collection of the facts, their study, and a special U.S. publication and press conference on the problem, followed by the wide circulation of the results abroad, appearances on *Al Jazeera*, advertisements in Arab newspapers, etc. The statistics will undermine one fatuous conception, that "terrorism is only Washington's problem," and another, that "terrorism would stop if U.S. policy on the Middle East changed." The results might also prompt more serious Muslims to help isolate and delegitimize the violent few within their faith.

Third, the self-described "jihadis" openly call for war upon most governments of the Middle East, North Africa, and other regions where Muslim leaders already hold power. As the Al Qaeda training manual makes clear, it is violence, not voting, that will change insufficiently pious Muslim regimes into fundamentalist dictatorships. One is pained to imagine the Middle East after the collapse of Jordan, the Gulf States, etc. Beyond this terrorist campaign, widely discussed in their documents, is there also an ultimate objective for these Islamist absolutists, a new transnational caliphate? There is, for some, and we cannot ignore their words. Skeptics do smile over terrorists' talk of a new caliphate, but in doing so they ignore a fact: the bomb-throwers know of a caliphate – in fact, it only perished in the early twentieth century. Moreover, terrorists will strive to achieve their dreams, realistic or no. Such bold declarations about destroying the status quo should become our own basis for wider appeal. The terrorists are handing us a ready-made alliance with all targeted Muslim governments. Our diplomacy, public or official, can address this, speaking frankly to the self-interests of the Muslim peoples.

Fourth, extremists who go as far as terrorism risk a war of civilizations. More than a few statements in the books and videos of Al Zawahiri and other leaders make it apparent that they wish to be conquerors. They now believe themselves to be at war; if they bring down their own governments, they will turn to further objectives. If the Sunni terrorists win, they are likely to roughly "police up" their own "stragglers" before turning to war

²⁰ This is no complaint of mere hindsight; I met briefly with a State Department ambassador on the matter in the months after September 2001, and later made a second attempt to get the State Department to make this argument.

²¹ It appears on page five of the White House document; of course, there may well be other such lines elsewhere in other documents.

upon the Shia. The opposite is equally true. If Shia victory came in this internecine war, which is (remotely) possible due to Iranian power, then Shia militants are likely to devastate the communities of Sunnis, and then shift their eyes to further targets. Recent history shows us that few terrorists give up their methods upon attaining power. Most continue the practices that have served them so well.

The best single basis for a rhetorical offensive remains ready for the taking. This argument would merely make use of gifts that good Muslim moderates have already presented. Spanish Sunni clerics assembled in 2005 and created a powerful *fatwa* that directly criticized terrorism for its defiance of the true faith. Then British clerics did a similar thing a few months later. Their declaration went so far as to tell Muslims who know of impending terrorism to turn the perpetrators into the authorities!²² In September 2007, a former mentor of Osama Bin Laden published a sort of confession, called an “Open Letter,” admitting how ruinous Al Qaeda terrorism has been for Muslims.²³ These are three examples of what many say they wish for: Muslim moderates delegitimizing Islamic extremists. What have been the results? At least in the first two cases, there was almost no notable public result. The White House and otherwise “talky” congressional leaders made no particular effort to advertise these superb *fatwas*, or treat them as the news events that they were. Perhaps the same critique applies to other governments. The general loss for such oversights is incalculable.

Conclusion

The struggle for public opinion is not lost; it is a long struggle, and has only begun. Thus far, from caves and hidden production studios and urban news outlets, Al Qaeda is easily outperforming Washington, and is far ahead in the scoring. It is past time for the latter to reexamine U.S. strategies, send dynamic new talent into the various arenas, and reengage the adversary, especially by making well-considered rhetorical offensives. And this effort needs to start now. Because, after all, it isn't a game at all. The nature of terrorism makes it deadly serious.

²² “Fatwa Issued Against Osama,” *Associated Press*, 14 March 2005; “British Muslim Utterly Condemn Acts of Terror,” 7 July 2005, on the website of The Muslim Council of Britain, located at Boardman House, Strafford, London. Each of these clerical documents deserved a full-page presentation in the annual for 2005 by the U.S. State Department, but it appears that neither was even mentioned in that volume.

²³ Fawaz A. Gerges, “His Mentor Turns on Bin Laden,” *International Herald Tribune* (22–23 September 2007).