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An Interim Assessment of September 11: What Has Changed and What Has Not?

ROBERT JERVIS

I do not think any of us has a definitive understanding of the causes and consequences of the terrorist attacks of September 11; I know that I do not. These events are so recent that we lack information as well as time for thought and discussion. Emotions also remain raw, and we have little general knowledge to draw on because our grasp of terrorism is even less secure than it is of other important social phenomena such as poverty, ethnic conflict, and wars. Terrorism grounded in religion poses special problems for modern social science, which has paid little attention to religion, perhaps because most social scientists find this subject uninteresting if not embarrassing. These obstacles help explain if not excuse why most of my arguments will be negative ones. It is easier to dispute some commonly held views than to say what is right. I will argue that the threat of terrorism is not as new as is often claimed, that terrorism reinforces state power more than it undermines it or exemplifies the decreasing importance of states, that the claims for reducing terrorism by getting at its root causes are largely tendentious, that viewing the struggle against terrorism as a war is problematic, and that the attacks of September 11 are not likely to greatly change world politics.

WHAT IS NEW?

When we are confronted with something as unsettling as the terrorist attacks, our first reaction is to see them as unprecedented, and indeed the world had never seen a terrorist attack that killed so many people. But terrorism itself is not new. A precise definition may be impossible, but some stab at one is unavoidable: the use of violence for political or social purposes that is not publicly

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authorized by leaders of recognized political units, including acts that are sponsored and supported by states, but not publicly avowed.

It is not surprising that terrorism is ancient, because individuals have never been fully bound to established states and terror is needed by the weak who lack other instruments. Terrorism, although not easy to mount, is much easier than fielding a full-scale military apparatus; a great deal of disruption is possible with relatively little force. Whether the goal is revenge, the hope to inflict enough pain to get the adversary to change its behavior, or the desire to call attention to one's cause, terror may be the only tool that might prove effective.

This is not to claim that September 11 represented nothing new, however. The form and scale of the attack obviously were enabled by modern technology. Airplanes could not be turned into weapons until recently; since people now live and work packed together, many can be killed in one blow; since modern societies are highly interconnected, they can be disrupted by limited destruction. The advantages that medical science has given the world are matched by the speed with which infectious diseases can be spread through air travel.

Modern societies may also be uniquely psychologically vulnerable. The density of personal networks multiplies the number of people who lost a relative or close friend or who know someone who did. Everyone I know in New York fits into the latter category if not the former. The rapid flow of information means that everyone immediately learns about any terrorist attack and follows it as it unfolds. Furthermore, because everyone gets this information, it dominates not only the thoughts of separated individuals but social conversation and so is incorporated into popular consciousness and culture. This effect is magnified by the availability of videos, which by their vividness make a deep and lasting impression.

Not only do terrorist attacks resonate more deeply through society than was the case in the past, but they are more shocking because we are no longer accustomed to war, violent domestic disturbances, and raging epidemics. People in the advanced democracies now see themselves, their relatives, and their friends live long and relatively tranquil lives. Terrorism was less shocking when it was only one of many forms of violent death that could be expected. Now it stands out, which helps explain why people so overreact. The fear of anthrax is much greater than concern about influenza, although the latter will kill thousands of times more Americans than the former and the chance of a massive anthrax attack is slight; people cancel flights to drive, at a greatly increased chance of dying.

Similar processes explain the economic impact of September 11. The attacks came at a time when the U.S. economy was slipping, and the direct effect through damage to the airline and tourist industries was significant. But this cannot explain most of the subsequent economic downturn. Consumer confidence is crucial and is susceptible to significant psychological magnification. Not only is confidence inherently subjective, being an estimate of how well the economy is likely to do in the future, but it is highly interdependent in the sense

that each person's confidence is in part based on her or his estimate of how confident others are. Positive feedbacks and bandwagon effects then are likely. These should not be dismissed as irrational: since the fate of the economy depends on how much people will buy, and this in turn is strongly influenced by their predictions of their future economic fortunes, I should be less confident if I think others are. So when shocks like terrorism are very widely felt and the level of consumer confidence is known to the general public, the economic health of the society is highly vulnerable. The chief economist of the International Monetary Fund noted that after September 11, most of the world economies suffered badly, not only because they reflected the downturn in the United States; but "One reason we have become more synchronized is because we're all watching CNN."¹

The obvious irony is that American society is now more vulnerable than the military. Although the military action in Afghanistan may have significantly reduced the threat of terrorism against the United States, at least in the short run, it cannot perform the standard function of defense. In the classical model, the armed forces literally stand between the population and the enemy. The development of air power and, even more, nuclear weapons reduced if not destroyed this conception, erecting in its place the edifice of deterrence. Fulfilling this mission required retaliatory forces to be as invulnerable as possible, buried deep beneath the soil or the oceans, and standard conceptions of the stability of a mutually deterrent relationship called for the civilian population to be unprotected so that neither side would be tempted to attack. No theories mandate civilian vulnerability to terrorism, but civilian targets are easier to destroy than are military ones, and civilian life is easier to disrupt than is the military. This might not be problematic if deterrence held, but terrorists have little to lose.

We should remember, however, that short of an attack by a lethal and infectious disease such as smallpox, no terrorist can inflict nearly as much damage as warfare.² Even a mere decade after the end of the cold war, it is easy to forget that we used to live with the possibility of unimaginable devastation. Interestingly enough, in the earlier years of the cold war, American leaders doubted that the country could live with such a prospect over a prolonged period of time.³ In fact, the country did adjust without sacrificing many of its deepest values, and this gives some hope for our ability to cope with the psychological burdens imposed by the new threats.

¹ Quoted in Joseph Kahn, "The World's Economies Slide Together Into Recession," *New York Times*, 25 November 2001.

² Of course, terrorists might employ a nuclear device, but these are likely to be very small in number and relatively small in lethality. They hardly compare to the destruction that either superpower could have brought on the other.

³ Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America's Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947–1956* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

THE DECLINE OF STATES?

At first glance, terrorism in general and September 11 in particular would seem to epitomize the declining relevance of states. Putting aside state-sponsored terrorism, these attacks are violence by private actors who are seeking public ends, which is just what states are supposed to stamp out. They represent the failure of states to protect their own citizens, which is their primary purpose. A world characterized by extensive terrorism is one in which states are not the most important actors.

September 11 also represents the declining importance of states in two other ways. First, terrorist groups are transnational, united not by their national citizenship or even the desire to form a state, but by religious and ideological beliefs. Although most of the hijackers were Saudis, letters found in al Qaeda headquarters in Kabul indicate that its members came from at least twenty countries.⁴ Were this a peaceful enterprise, we would celebrate it as showing the ability of people from different countries, social classes, and experiences to work together. Second, the attack demonstrates the importance of globalization. Not only did the hijackers come from many countries, but they traveled throughout the world and depended on the efficient movement of information and money. Their motives and goals also epitomize globalization. They are seeking not the expansion or retraction of national power, let alone territory, but the stanching of the global flow of corrupting ideas and the protection if not expansion of the realm in which proper forms of Islam dominate.

There is something to these arguments, but in other ways September 11 and its sequels show the crucial role of states. To start with, al Qaeda gained much of its capabilities through its close ties to, if not its capture of, the Afghan government. It could not have operated as it did without the acquiescence and the sponsorship of the state government. Extensive training of terrorists would have been impossible; semipermanent headquarters could not have been established; the maintenance of a far-flung network would have been extremely difficult. In a way, the United States has ratified and reinforced the links between terrorists and states by making it clear that it will now hold the latter accountable for any acts of terror emanating from their territory.⁵

The targets of September 11 also included major elements of state power. The Pentagon was attacked, and the White House probably was the target of the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania. The response further showed the continued centrality of states. Most strikingly, American public opinion and even traditionally antistate conservatives immediately looked to the organs of the

⁴ David Rhoad, "On Paper Scraps, Talk of Judgment Day and Words To Friends At Home," *New York Times*, 24 November 2001.

⁵ It can be argued that this stance, and the attack against Afghanistan, will weaken states by ignoring their sovereignty and perhaps opening the door to other modifications of this cornerstone of the state system. But sovereignty always has been complex, flexible, and pragmatic. See Stephen Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

government for order and protection. The national guard was sent to New York City and airports; federal moneys poured into affected locales; airport security personnel was federalized; the federal government was granted greatly increased powers of investigation and prosecution, despite the doubts of the relatively isolated group of civil libertarians. In a time of crisis, Americans turned not to their churches, multinational corporations, or the UN, but to the national government. For better or for worse, one of the long-run consequences of September 11 is almost certain to be a larger and more powerful state apparatus.

Internationally as well, states were the dominant actors in the response. The United States put together a coalition of states, and when dealing with countries like Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, did so in a way that increased the power of those states over their own societies by providing resources and expertise. Although the coalition is not an ordinary alliance, being more ad hoc and flexible, an alliance of states it nevertheless is. It also uses traditional diplomatic, economic, and military instruments. The technology is modern, and the intelligence network represents a form of globalization, but there is little in the fundamental nature of the activities that would surprise an observer of the past centuries.

WE MUST GET AT THE ROOT CAUSES OF TERRORISM: WE MUST UNDERSTAND WHY WE ARE HATED

It has become a truism, especially among liberals, that while attacking al Qaeda is necessary, it is not sufficient. Even if the campaign is successful, terrorism will recur unless the United States and its allies deal with the conditions that produced it. Central among these are grinding poverty in the Third World, great and increasing inequality within and among nations, corrupt and unresponsive governments, and American policies that too often range it along side of the forces of injustice and oppression. In some ways, this argument is deeply attractive. We all want to make this a better world, and few would disagree with the proposition that poverty and oppression cause enormous misery around the world.

This perspective is misleading as an explanation for terrorism or a prescription for dealing with it, however. It is difficult to say exactly what the root causes of terrorism are. Poverty and lack of liberties do not appear on the list of grievances articulated by terrorist leaders, and neither the al Qaeda leadership nor the hijackers were poor. Of course, leaders of almost all political causes are drawn from the upper and middle classes of society; perhaps they would not have chosen their cause had their societies been richer and more egalitarian. But rich societies produce their own terrorists and many poor societies do not, and it is hard to argue that poverty is either a necessary or a sufficient cause of terrorism. There is one specific thing that the United States could do that in all probability will have a good effect, however: it could provide funds for educa-

tion and press Muslim governments to do likewise; as it stands now, parents often send their children to madrassas because no other education is available.

To see the absence of liberal arrangements as the root cause of terrorism is even more perverse. Tolerance for diversity, respect for human rights as the West defines them, free and diverse mass media, vigorous political competition, and equality for women is not the vision of the good society held by the terrorists and their supporters. The very notion of elevating the rights of individuals and the ability to choose one's way of life is anathema to them. Traditions, real or imagined, community values as they interpret them, and life regulated by Muslim clerics who read the Koran the way Taliban leaders did are their avowed objectives. Perhaps if their countries were remodeled along Western lines, terrorism would eventually subside. But resistance, including terrorism, would almost certainly increase during the transition, which could last for generations.⁶

Even if poverty, inequality, and oppression were the root causes of terrorism, there is little reason to think that we could deal with them effectively. Many of us believe that the United States should provide higher levels of economic assistance to the Third World and lower tariff barriers to their goods, but we cannot point to solid evidence to support the argument that doing so would make much difference. For all our studies, we are far from a complete understanding of what produces democracy, a well-functioning civil society, and respect for human rights. It is even less clear that the relevant variables can be much affected by outside interventions. It can be argued that one of the main barriers to democracy in Islamic countries is the lack of a separation between church and state and an acceptance of the idea that even in a religiously homogeneous society the direct political influence of theological leaders should be limited. It is hard to see what outsiders could do to effect such a separation, however.

Somewhat parallel to the call for attacking the root causes of terrorism is the plea to understand why the perpetrators undertook such dreadful acts. There are many barriers to understanding, starting with the fact that the terrorists come from different cultural and religious backgrounds than we do. Even if we can trust the translations of their statements, they metaphorically as well as literally speak a different language. Furthermore, there are political and psychological inhibitions to understanding why one is hated, since this may lead to asking whether there is some validity to the grievances. This is why a few hotheads initially attacked such pleas, seeing them as excusing the terrorists. I do not think this is fair. Understanding and even empathy is not inconsistent with the strongest possible condemnation.

⁶This is why Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), far from proclaiming the superiority of the West and calling for the westernization of the world, asks for toleration of different cultures and decries Western attempts to force its values and way of life on others. To interfere in other cultures is a recipe for greatly increasing conflict to no good end.

Once we put aside these superficial objections, the need for understanding is almost self-evident. Intellectuals seek understanding for its own sake; policy makers need understanding to establish an appropriate policy. But it is worth noting that the second proposition is not without its problems. Sometimes understanding a problem can push solutions beyond reach. One important historical case is British policy following the fall of France in May 1940. Almost alone among top British decision makers, Winston Churchill adamantly opposed opening peace talks with Germany, but he reached (or at least justified) his conclusion on the basis of wildly incorrect information and misleading analysis.⁷ More generally, Albert Hirschman has shown that many important human endeavors are made possible only by what he calls the “hiding hand.”⁸ We start many ventures because we greatly underestimate the hindrances and are fortunate to fully understand them only when we have invested so much time and effort that it seems better to push on rather than try something else. Had we understood the magnitude of the task at the start, we never would have undertaken it, as many advanced graduate students come to appreciate. Collective action problems may also be harder to solve if they are understood. Many voluntary associations and related efforts succeed because few members understand that each individual’s contribution is too small to make a noticeable difference. Thus it is not surprising that when I ask my students to play a form of a collective action game in class, the level of successful cooperation falls from the introductory class to the advanced undergraduate class to the graduate classes. Sometimes a lot of learning is even more dangerous than a little.

Putting aside this possibility, the worthy cause of understanding why the United States is hated may lead in directions unanticipated by those who call loudest for the effort. Bin Laden appears to hate the United States both for what it is and what it has done. The United States exemplifies consumerism, individual choice, and a relatively high degree of sexual permissiveness and equality. By being so powerful around the world, it cannot but be a threat to cultures that are built on very different values. The terrorists and others who share these concerns are not being paranoid to fear that fundamentalist Islam will be under great pressure from corrosive Western values as long as the latter have global reach.

Of course, the United States has not been passive, and the terrorists see a number of horrific policies. Foremost among them is the stationing of troops in Saudi Arabia and the support for a corrupt Saudi regime. Thus it is no accident that most of the hijackers were Saudis. The grievance that is second in

⁷ P. M. H. Bell, *A Certain Eventuality: Britain and the Fall of France* (Farnborough, UK: Saxon House, 1974); David Reynolds, “Churchill and the British ‘Decision’ to Fight on in 1940: Right Policy, Wrong Reasons” in Richard Langhorne, ed., *Diplomacy and Intelligence During the Second World War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 147–67. A recent, more popular treatment is John Lukacs, *Five Days in London: May 1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

⁸ Albert Hirschman, *Development Projects Observed* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1967), 9–34.

prominence is the American attacks on Iraq. But it is not clear whether this position is much more than an attempt to cater to the beliefs of the followers; Saddam Hussein's regime, although repressive, has not propagated fundamentalist Islam. Bin Laden also berates the United States for its support of Israel, although this position received stress only after September 11 and also may be designed to garner support from the widest possible Arab audience. Furthermore, bin Laden's opposition is to the existence of Israel and the American support for the Jewish state, not to the settlements or Israeli sovereignty over parts of Jerusalem.

What this means is that there are no conceivable changes in the United States and American policy that could reduce al Qaeda's hatred. Powerful states are always hated, even if they exercise their power relatively benignly.⁹ Perhaps the United States might reduce the terrorists' hatred by withdrawing its troops from Saudi Arabia. Whether this would do any good at this point is far from clear, however, and probably would increase the chance of another Iraqi attack on Kuwait.

The much larger group throughout the Islamic world that has some sympathy for the September 11 attacks and that sees bin Laden as at least in part a hero and is glad to see the United States humbled by the attacks, is of course harder to analyze, being much more disparate. Much of the rage is attributable to their own governments, which are unable to provide a decent life for their people while sponsoring mass media that blame most of their ills on the United States. Democracy, reform, and more diverse media might have good effect here, especially if they were coupled with economic growth that led to improved lives for society's lower strata. But whether such an outcome could be produced by a different United States policy is questionable.

Turning to foreign policy, following a more "moderate" policy toward Iraq and lifting the embargo would meet one of the grievances. But doing so might not reduce suffering within Iraq, because the oil-for-food program already provides sufficient funds to provide food and medicine for the people of Iraq, and it is unclear that a change in American policy would lead to a change in Saddam's priorities. If the United States were to withdraw its protective umbrella over the northern areas, the regime would reestablish control, with the resulting repression and flow of refugees. If the terrorists were motivated by compassion for the Kurds, this could increase terrorism.

United States support for Israel is perhaps highest on the list of grievances in the Muslim world. Over the long run, the Arab-Israeli dispute and the American role in it may play a large role in cultivating the next generation of terrorists, even if it has not generated the current one. But in the short run, it is hard to tell what difference United States policy would make, and the United States was not without enemies when it was actively promoting a settlement that would

⁹ See Richard Betts, "The Soft Underbelly of American Primacy," *Political Science Quarterly* 117 (Spring 2002).

have given the PLO a state, most of the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. It is also interesting that those who believe that the United States could diminish Arab hatred toward it by pressing for an Israeli withdrawal also believe that this policy is moral and would bring peace between Israel and its neighbors. Here, as with policy toward Iraq, those who call for a tougher stance toward Israel (or toward the PLO) held these views on 10 September. It would be more impressive if those advocating a different American policy in the Middle East argued that while the old policy had been appropriate previously and was morally well-grounded, the new circumstances require a courting of important groups in the Middle East even at Israel's expense. I think that if the shoe had been on the other foot and circumstances had arisen that could lead people to call for greater American support for an unyielding Israeli policy, calls to do so would be rejected by liberals on the grounds that it would be wrong to make people in the Middle East pay for a policy that served American interests elsewhere.

More reasonable is the argument that the roots of much terrorism lie in the intolerance and hatred preached in many mosques and taught in madrases, often supported by Saudi money. While those who reject social constructivism should be slow to give too much credit to the power of socialization and should ask why these messages find a receptive audience, al Qaeda surely would have had fewer recruits had these voices been quieter or were alternative views expressed clearly by other religious and political leaders. But for many countries, tolerating or sponsoring religious extremism is more attractive than domestic reform, and it is far from clear how much the United States can do to change this landscape.

The call to understand why people hate us, while intellectually sound, is largely motivated by political agendas unrelated to September 11. There are many reasons to object to the Bush administration's policy in the Middle East—I myself think it has been badly misguided—but it is disingenuous to claim that such a conclusion follows from an understanding of the motives of the terrorists or why the United States is hated in the Islamic world. Almost any course of action can be rationalized on the grounds that it will reduce terrorism. Thus a member of the Kuwaiti parliament urged that his country adopt Sharia on the grounds that if this were done, "there would be no terrorism."¹⁰

IT'S A WAR

In his speech to a joint session of Congress after the attack, President George W. Bush declared that the United States was waging a war against terrorism, and it used military force to overthrow the government of Afghanistan. But this

¹⁰ Quoted in Douglas Jehl, "Democracy's Uneasy Steps in Islamic World," *New York Times*, 23 November 2001. Also see Serge Schmemmann, "U.N. Gets a Litany of Antiterror Plans," *ibid.*, 12 January 2002; and Neil MacFarquhar, "Syria Repackages Its Repression of Muslim Militants as Antiterror Lesson," *ibid.*, 14 January 2002.

was not a “normal” war, and the very label is contentious and questionable.¹¹ To start with, the overthrow of the Afghan government was not the ultimate goal of the effort but only a means to combat terrorism. The point was not to change Afghan external policy or reduce the power of that regime or country, as it would have been in most wars. Rather, Afghanistan was attacked in order to install a new government that would eliminate the terrorists; had it been possible to attack the terrorists directly, this would have been done and the Afghan authorities, even though repellant to many American values, would have been left in place.

If this is a war, the obvious question is what its objectives are. The normal answer would be to get the adversary to withdraw from disputed territory, to make it impossible for that country to follow obnoxious policies, or to replace a government that was deemed a menace by its very existence. But these conceptions of victory seem inappropriate here, and there are no clear replacements. So it is not surprising that the administration has never issued a definitive statement of its war aims. Secretaries Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld have said that the war will be won when Americans feel secure again, an objective that sounds more like psychotherapy than international politics. This is not to say that it is an inappropriate formulation when dealing with terrorism, however. By its nature, terror seeks to utilize political and psychological leverage in order to produce political effects that are disproportionate to the military force deployed. To the extent that it is more than mere revenge (a motive not to be underestimated, as I will discuss later), it seeks change through inducing fear, and generally fear that is a magnified rather than a true reflection of what else could follow. So reducing fear and making Americans feel secure should be a crucial focus of American policy. But it is an unusual reason to wage a war.

Making Americans feel secure is presumably related to destroying al Qaeda and the Taliban regime that was linked to it. But as Bush has said on numerous occasions, Afghanistan and the terrorists located there are only the first target of the American efforts. With whom exactly are we at war? Who else is to be attacked? What constitutes terrorism? How do we distinguish terrorism from insurgency, let alone fighters for freedom? Will we keep fighting until terrorism disappears or will we be content with the lesser objective of reducing terrorism to manageable levels? What constitutes harboring terrorism, which Bush has equated with terrorism itself? Questions like these can never be answered with complete clarity, and fortunately a coherent response is not necessary for a sensible policy. Indeed, under most circumstances the questions are not even asked, because satisfactory answers will not be forthcoming. But if one calls for a war, it becomes harder to avoid them, and the messy pragmatism, ambiguity, and inconsistency that are normal facts of policy life become more troublesome.

The most obvious question, which may be answered by the time this article appears in print, is whether the United State should attack Iraq. A significant

¹¹ See Michael Howard, “What’s in a Name? How to Fight Terrorism,” *Foreign Affairs* 81 (January-February 2002): 8–13.

group has long felt that the first Bush administration made a mistake by not finishing off Saddam Hussein after the Gulf War, although the difficulties in doing so are rarely examined. These people have been quick to see ambiguous evidence as indicating close links between Iraq and al Qaeda, just as opponents of this policy have been quick to provide other interpretations of the evidence. They have argued that Saddam is rapidly developing weapons of mass destruction.¹² Even if these points are granted, the obvious question is whether Saddam can be deterred from using these weapons. Saying that we are at war, however, distracts us from asking this or implies that deterrence has broken down and that the use rather than the threat of force is necessary.

The main alternative target to Iraq is the al Qaeda cells in other countries, especially Somalia, Yemen, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Whether these countries are “harboring” terrorists by Bush’s definition is unclear, as is it whether the governments would cooperate with any American efforts. I suspect that what will drive American policy, however, is less an analysis of these threats and the impact of antiterrorism on local stability than the debate over whether to attack Iraq. That is, those who favor doing so will downplay the significance of these cells; those who oppose it will argue that the rest of al Qaeda is the most urgent target in the knowledge that the United States cannot take on both this far-flung effort and a war against Iraq.¹³

The label “war” implies the primary use of military force. Other instruments like diplomacy and intelligence may be used, but they are in service of the deployment of armed force. I believe this conceptual frame is unfortunate when it comes to dealing with terrorism. Here diplomacy, the international criminal justice system, and especially intelligence are primary. With good information, almost everything can be done to reduce terrorism; without it, very little is possible. Force and the threat of force play a vital role both in helping to generate information and in the final elimination of terrorist targets, but intelligence and international information-sharing is central. If they are sacrificed in order to gain military advantage, the policy will suffer. Thinking of this as war then gets us thinking in the wrong terms.

Others have seen the advantages of taking the United States at its word and justifying their behavior in terms of fighting terrorism. In addition to the Russian

¹² In his press conference of 26 November, Bush equated the seeking of weapons of mass destruction to “terrorize nations” with terrorism. In this context, it is worth asking why there has been no call to target Iran, a country that has sponsored more terrorism than Iraq, is closer to gaining nuclear weapons, and is more anti-Israeli and almost as anti-American. The obvious reply is that there is a greater chance of peaceful change in that country than in Iraq, but I suspect that at least as important is the strength of the anti-Saddam faction within the U.S. elite, which realizes that military action against Iran would undercut the possibility of moving against Iraq.

¹³ The leaks that form the basis of news stories about al Qaeda outside of Afghanistan should be read in this light: see, for example, Bob Drogin and Paul Watson, “Battlefield Clues Key to Bush’s Next Step,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 December 2001; David Cloud, “U.S. Believes Al Qaeda Bases in Somalia Could be Ousted Through Limited Force,” *Wall Street Journal*, 12 December 2001; Gerald Seib, “U.S. Must Prevent Another ‘Afghanistan’ Where Terrorists Can Find Safe Harbor,” *ibid.*

rhetoric in its conflict in Chechnya, a leader of Hamas said that no one expected the United States to refrain from violence in response to the September 11 attack, “so why do you expect me to react peacefully to occupation?”¹⁴ In parallel, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon argues: “You in America are in a war against terror. We in Israel are in a war against terror. It’s the same war.”¹⁵ One of his advisers explained that “the Palestinian Authority has an obligation to no longer harbor or give shelter to international terrorist organizations” like Hamas.¹⁶ The Indians have equated 13 December (the date of the attack on their parliament) with September 11, an interpretation the United States has largely endorsed. All sorts of domestic oppression are also being claimed as counter-terrorism. Thus the Mugabe government in Zimbabwe claimed that critical reporters “are assisting terrorists. . . . We would like them to know that we agree with President Bush that anyone who in any way finances, harbors or defends terrorists is himself a terrorist. We, too, will not make any difference between terrorists and their friends or supporters.”¹⁷

The United States has responded that this war is not against terrorism in general, however, but only against “terrorism with a global reach,” as Bush put it in his speech of 20 September. This modifier nicely gets the United States out of one dilemma, but opens the door to several others. If the war were to be against all terrorism, defeat would be inevitable and the collateral damage would be enormous. Even on the unreasonable assumption that such an effort would receive widespread support abroad, it would engender enormous opposition as well. In December, bloody suicide attacks against Israel and the Indian parliament led the United States to broaden its definition, pushing Arafat and Musharraf to eliminate the groups responsible. But the focus and consistency of the American effort remains to be seen.

To say that we are at war only with a subset of terrorists raises the question of in whose interest the war is being waged. The United States seeks worldwide support on the grounds that al Qaeda and related groups are seeking weapons of mass destruction, which “would be a threat to every nation and, eventually, to civilization itself.”¹⁸ But terrorists, even with nuclear weapons, do not target the entire globe. Instead, they attack sites in and representatives of particular states. As a Russian diplomat said to me shortly after Bush’s speech, “Ah, a global reach—that means terrorists who can attack the US.” Terrorists in Sri Lanka, for

¹⁴ Quoted in James Bennett, “Israeli Soldier Killed in Gaza, Nablus Mourns a Hamas Leader,” *New York Times*, 25 November 2001.

¹⁵ Quoted in William Safire, “Israel or Arafat,” *ibid.*, 3 December 2001; also see the remarks quoted in James Bennett, “Israelis Storm Village in the West Bank,” *ibid.*, 25 October 2001; Bennett, “15 Israelis Die in Bus Attack,” *ibid.*, 3 December 2001.

¹⁶ Quoted in Bennett, “New Clashes in Gaza; Hamas to Limit Suicide Attacks,” *ibid.*, 22 December 2001.

¹⁷ Rachel L. Swarns, “West’s Envoys Unhappy, Find Zimbabwe Unhelpful,” *New York Times*, 24 November 2001; also see Tony Hawkins, “Harare to Hold Talks Today on Sanctions Threat,” *Financial Times*, 17 December 2001.

¹⁸ Quoted in “President’s Words: ‘Lift This Dark Threat,’” *New York Times*, 7 November 2001.

example, do not seem to qualify. Neither, I suspect, would the IRA if it were to resume violence in Northern Ireland. (This is fortunate, because an attack on areas supporting these terrorists would require military action in New York's Lower East Side and Boston's South End.) Would renewed Algerian terrorism in France be "global"? I suspect the answer would turn on the extent of French support for American efforts. Politically and rhetorically convenient in the short run, Bush's answer to the question of what terrorists we are at war with may prove more troublesome over the long run, at minimum in highlighting American hypocrisy. It might have been more straightforward and honorable to declare that it was only terrorists who could menace American assets and allies that were our target.¹⁹

Framing the conflict as war also implies that we must be prepared to sacrifice many values in order to prevail. In a normal war, this would mean that men would be called to the colors and those at home would expect to endure economic privation and even enemy bombardment. But none of this is required here. Logic might suggest that our leaders would tell people that they must accept further acts of terrorism in order to win the struggle, but instead we are being urged to fly and shop.²⁰

Greater sacrifices are being required in the area of civil liberties. The claim that we must accept intrusions and restrictions that were previously intolerable is justified not by detailed claims that the value of the information produced will outweigh the cost to our privacy and liberty but rather by blanket assertions that war requires measures that were previously unacceptable. Similarly, careful arguments for bringing terrorists before military tribunals are short-circuited by statements that this is what is done during wartime. As Bush declared: "The United States is under attack. And at war, the president needs to have the capacity to protect the national security interests and the safety of the American people."²¹

¹⁹ See David Sanger, "As the Battlefield Changes, So Does the War Itself," *New York Times*, 23 December 2001; Serge Schmemmann, "Caution: This Weapon May Backfire," *ibid.*, 30 December 2001. Perhaps because of the apparent success of the operation in Afghanistan, in early 2002 American rhetoric and some of its actions expanded to encompass terrorism in general. This is consistent with indications that Bush will seek to exploit and reinforce American hegemony. As he said in his press conference in response to criticisms of U.S. unilateralism levied by the French foreign minister: people around the world "understand . . . that history has given us a unique opportunity to defend freedom. And we're going to seize the moment, and do it." See "President Bush, Prime Minister Koizumi Hold Press Conference," White House press release, 18 February 2002. The clearest rationale for such a stance was the draft Defence Policy Guidance for Fiscal Years 1994–1999 that was written by Paul Wolfowitz when he was in Bush senior's Pentagon. The document was toned down after it was leaked to the press: *New York Times*, 8 March 1992 and 24 May 1992.

²⁰ For a good statement of the sacrifices that Bush might ask of Americans, see Thomas Friedman, "Ask Not What. . .," *New York Times*, 9 December 2001.

²¹ Quoted in Elisabeth Bumiller and Katharine Q. Seelye, "Bush Defends Wartime Call for Tribunals," *New York Times*, 15 December 2001. More recently, "President Bush has issued an executive order barring union representation at United States attorneys' offices and at four other agencies in the Justice Department. . . . out of concern that union contracts could restrict the ability of workers in the Justice Department to protect Americans and national security." Steven Greenhouse, "Bush, Citing Security, Bans Some Unions at Justice Dept." *ibid.*, 16 January 2002.

THE TERRORISM IS SENSELESS

The attacks of September 11 seem not only inhumane but senseless. It is hard to see what objective bin Laden thought he could reach. I doubt that he really expected to change American support for Saudi Arabia and Israel or its opposition to Iraq. His actions also seem self-defeating, because they endangered his life, al Qaeda, and the Taliban regime.

But actions that are horrible are not necessarily irrational. Bin Laden and his colleagues may have been motivated first of all by the desire for revenge and what they saw as justice. The United States had committed great crimes and had to be punished. Even if the attacks could not set the world aright, they would at least make the United States pay a price for its awful deeds. We—or at least academics—often underestimate the importance of revenge. Emotional, primitive, unamenable to analysis, it does not seem to belong in a civilized country. But it does. In everyday life we often try to inflict small punishments on others who have harmed us, not because we think it will change them, but because we think this is appropriate. The centerpiece of U.S. strategic policy during the cold war was the threat to massively retaliate against a Soviet attack on the United States. Putting aside arcane war-fighting scenarios of interest to a few theorists, the attack to which the United States was seen as responding would have been one that utterly destroyed it. Retaliation could have reached no meaningful goal and would have been motivated entirely by revenge. No one doubted the credibility of this threat, however.

Bin Laden may also have had an instrumental purpose. His focus may have been less on the United States and the short run than on the Islamic world over a longer period. He could have reasoned that a dramatic action would put his movement and ideology at the center of attention. He could expect to multiply the strength of his cause even if he was to die in the effort. As E. E. Schattschneider showed, the outcome of a conflict is often determined by the number and kind of people who are mobilized to join in it.²² Bin Laden may also have expected the attack to serve as a provocation that would lead the United States to strike out in a way that would rally support for him. Although September 11 cannot be seen as a “clash of civilizations,” he may have hoped to generate one.

THE UNITED STATES MUST NOT WALK AWAY FROM AFGHANISTAN AGAIN

It is often argued that the Taliban and bin Laden are a product of previous American actions in supporting the resistance to Soviet rule and then ignoring the country when the cold war ended. The first claim is largely correct, although the implied counterfactual may not be. That is, it can be argued that even without American aid the mujahedeen eventually would have forced the Soviet Union to withdraw.

²² E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960).

However this may be, it is certainly true that the United States lost interest in Afghanistan after the end of the cold war. The lesson is obvious: the United States and others now must stay fully engaged. The implicit counterfactual here is that if the United States had remained involved, a more benign Afghan regime could have developed. While I share this view, we cannot be sure and should not overestimate what outsiders can do. Coalition building is extremely difficult for outsiders; nation building may be impossible. Both our knowledge and the relevant resources are sharply limited. In the short run, violence can be suppressed and some laws reestablished. Outside organizations are not without instruments they can deploy, especially money and technical assistance; but these instruments are not magic bullets and many of the consequences are unintended. A host of questions arise. Should we try to work through local leaders who can control their own areas and then cooperate with counterparts from different groups? Should we seek central power-sharing arrangements that aim at stability, the limitation of power of the local warlords, and reduced political competition? Should we instead push for new political groupings that cross-cut older rivalries? It is neither clear whether outsiders could implement such arrangements or whether they would produce the desired effects. Even food aid can backfire in several ways, for example by providing a resource that fuels violence, bolstering only those factions that are able to work with the aid groups, and discouraging farmers from returning to their fields.

None of this is to say that the United States and its allies should abandon Afghanistan, but we should not conclude that the previous abandonment created today's misery or have high expectations for what we can achieve. As one observer said about the dreary results of a variety of international efforts in Somalia: "Total benign neglect is problematic, but total engagement and obsession is problematic as well."²³

A NEW WORLD?

It is often said that "everything has changed after September 11," "this is the end of the post-cold war era," and "the world will never be the same." Although the truth is yet to be revealed, I am skeptical.²⁴ I think it unlikely that the world will unite against terrorism or that American foreign policy will take on a basically new orientation.

One claim is that terrorism is such a scourge that the nations of the world will unite against it, just as most countries pull together if they are attacked.

²³ Quoted in Mark Turner, "Somalia Provides Lesson in Non-Interference," *Financial Times*, 19 November 2001.

²⁴ This is not to deny the importance of other drastic changes in world politics that are recent but pre-date September 11, most importantly the fact that war among the leading powers is now unthinkable: John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Robert Jervis, "Theories of War in an Era of Leading Power Peace," *American Political Science Review* 96 (March 2002).

The Bush administration argues that this is what should happen, seeing the conflict as one of civilization against evil which must trump all differences. So the United States tells India and Pakistan to stand down and join the common coalition and urges Israel and the PLO to subordinate their dispute to the common cause. The expectation that the world will fall into line is not entirely unreasonable. In the past, nations put aside old conflicts when faced by an even more pressing common enemy, as Britain and the USSR finally did in their struggle against Nazi Germany. But I doubt that most countries see terrorism as posing a threat of this magnitude, although a serious biological or nuclear attack might change this. At this point, however, it is hard to argue that India has more reason to fear al Qaeda than Pakistan, nor are most other countries in the world more concerned about this network than they are by neighbors or local threats.²⁵

Even if few countries support al Qaeda, many use forms of terror to advance their own goals. If the struggle were against terrorism rather than anti-American terrorism, these countries would have to forego many of their most valued objectives. And if the enemy is anti-American terror, there is even less reason for countries to unite against it, although the United States does have powerful incentives to deploy.

This is not to say that many countries have not taken advantage of the new opportunities offered by September 11. Sudan has accepted the American “get out of jail free” card by offering intelligence cooperation in return for being removed from the list of countries that sponsor terrorism. Pakistan was transformed from a nuclear-powered troublemaker and an enemy of the new American potential ally in the region (India) to a pillar of stability meriting extensive aid and a forgiveness of past sins. Uzbekistan’s lack of democracy and violations of human rights were put aside to gain necessary bases.

Most importantly, Russia has given the United States great support and facilitated its gaining bases in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in return for tacit Western approval of its attacks on “Islamic terrorists” in Chechnya and their supporters in Georgia. More far-reaching cooperation seems in train on strategic arms and relations with NATO. President Vladimir Putin has attributed much of this dramatic shift to September 11: “We would like to see our joint struggle against terrorism to lead to positive results, that terrorism not only in Afghanistan but the entire world be destroyed, uprooted, liquidated. . . . It is quite obvious to any objective observer that we can find an effective response to these challenges only if we pull our efforts together.” To do this, both the United States and Russia must shed “the fears of the past” and understand that they

²⁵ The conflict between India and Pakistan over the alignment of the new Afghan regime influenced the struggle over the regime’s composition and the American efforts to build a broad-based coalition. For India’s moves on the diplomatic front, see Edward Luce, “India Moves Quickly to Build Kabul Links,” *Financial Times*, 13 December 2001.

share a commitment to democratic values and market economics. Those who think otherwise “simply do not understand the way the world has changed.”²⁶

The change here does seem real, although many difficult issues are still being postponed, and it is hard to say what Russian-American relations would have been like had the attack not occurred. Perhaps typifying the new but mixed relationship is what happened with the ABM treaty: on the one hand the two countries could not agree, but on the other hand Putin accepted the U.S. withdrawal. In general, Putin has taken September 11 as an opportunity to retreat from positions that Russian weakness made untenable and to try to maximize gains in terms of American support. Furthermore, frictions remain over issues like the extension of NATO and Russia’s ties to that organization, America’s increased role in central Asia,²⁷ and the Russian attempt to maintain its influence over the Northern Alliance. It is then premature to proclaim a new era of Russian-American relations.

At least as dramatic but probably more temporary is the change in U.S.–China relations. Before September 11, the Bush administration said that China was the greatest menace to world peace. This discussion has ceased and for its part the Peoples Republic of China has been quick to point out that it staunchly opposes terrorism throughout the world, and especially in the Muslim province of Xinjiang. But I doubt that this common interest will prove sufficient to override the conflict over Taiwan and other issues.

If terrorism does not represent a truly common threat, let alone one of sufficient magnitude to override all other disputes, then perhaps it will at least induce the Bush administration to modify its previous unilateralism. Not only does the United States need the cooperation of many other countries to attack al Qaeda, but the success of the joint efforts may teach the United States that multilateralism is a generally effective stance.²⁸ Here, too, we are in the realm of prediction rather than explanation, but again I am skeptical. Bush has welcomed foreign support and been willing to make trades to gain it, but unchanged is the deep-seated belief that both the world and the United States are best served if the latter refuses to be restrained by others’ views. International organizations can help reach American goals at minimum cost, but the United States should not be guided by international consensus. It has not budged from its unilateral rejection of the Kyoto Protocol, the International Criminal Court, the ABM Treaty, and the proposed arrangements for ensuring that states do not develop biological weapons. The basic logic that it is often advantageous for great powers to bind themselves to quasi-constitutional rules in order to reassure others

²⁶ Quoted in Michael Wines, “Putin Urges A ‘New Level’ of the Trust With America,” *New York Times*, 11 November 2001; also see Wines, “NATO Plan Offers Russian Equal Voice on Some Issues,” *ibid.*, 23 November 2001.

²⁷ See, for example, Fred Weir, “Russia Wary of Postwar Goals,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 December 2001.

²⁸ See, for example, G. John Ikenberry, “After September 11: American Grand Strategy in the Age of Terror,” *Survival* 43 (Winter 2001–2002): 19–34.

and so elicit their cooperation is appealing to academics and some liberal policy makers,²⁹ but not to the Bush administration and major segments of American opinion. To take just one example, John Bolton, the undersecretary of state for arms control and international security affairs, said that the Bush administration would not wait for “slow moving multilateral mechanisms that are happening in the real world.”³⁰ In response to actions that embody such views, foreign diplomats can only say: “Big partners should consult with smaller partners.”³¹ The operative word is “should.”

For many of us, not a day will pass in which we will not think of September 11. Nevertheless, it may not change the world as much as it now appears. It is striking how much the diverse “lessons” of this event reinforce what the learner already believed. With the significant exceptions of many of the calls for increased domestic security and sacrifices of civil liberties, the measures that various groups advocate, from building missile defense, to shunning missile defense, to greater support of Sharon’s policies, to greater opposition to them, to greater multilateralism, to increased economic assistance to the poor, to freer world trade, to shielding weak groups from the foreign competition, to tax cuts at home all correspond to what the advocates had wanted earlier.³² It is yet possible that the shock we have all felt will be translated into greater agreement and effective measures to deal with the world’s ills, but I suspect that differences in diagnosis, values, and interests will continue to characterize how we understand terrorism and conduct world politics.*

²⁹ G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding Order After Major War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

³⁰ Quoted in David E. Sanger, “After the Taliban, Who? Don’t Forget North Korea,” *New York Times*, 25 November 2001.

³¹ Quoted in Steven Erlanger, “Bush’s Move on ABM Pact Gives Pause to Europeans,” *ibid.*, 13 December 2001; also see Suzanne Daley, “Many in Europe Voice Worry that U.S. Will Not Consult Them,” *ibid.*, 31 January 2002.

³² The most plausible argument that September 11 has strengthened the case for missile defense has not been widely made: it would increase the credibility of the threat to attack states that both possess weapons of mass destruction and harbor terrorists.

* I am grateful for comments by Robert Art, Richard Betts, and Demetrios James Caraley.