The War On Terrorism:

Managing Risks and Sustaining Public Support

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The War on Terrorism:

Managing Risks and Sustaining Public Support

"We must use the full influence of the United States to delegitimize terrorism and make clear that all acts of terrorism will be viewed in the same light as slavery, piracy, or genocide: behavior that no responsible government can condone or support and all must oppose. In short, with our friends and allies, we aim to establish a new international norm regarding terrorism requiring non-support, non-tolerance, and active opposition to all terrorists.[1]

Key Judgments

The United States and the West – and indeed most of the Islamic world – face a challenge from extremist Islamist ideologues that use terrorism as a tactic to advance their cause of the expulsion of "infidel" influences from the Islamic world. Their principal goal is to replace both secular and traditional leadership and social structures with their notion of a "pure" Islamic state. For a range of reasons – from preventing damage at home to maintaining our influence in strategically important areas of the world – the United States has and will continue to resist this terror campaign by what it has dubbed the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).[2]

While the "war" designation has some advantages, it also has serious drawbacks. These include the ideas that that there is a clearly defined enemy and that a definitive "victory" is possible. A novel and unsettling state of affairs for the U.S. public is that for the first time in many years, the nation must live in a state of permanent alert and preparedness to cope with a sudden man-made emergency of unpredictable proportions. Security and disaster response capabilities ranging from local to national to international must be honed and prepared to respond quickly and effectively.

Central to combating this threat is recognition that the goal of the radical Islamist terrorists, like others, is not so much to do direct damage as to use the capacity to do random violence, especially to civilians, precisely to induce broad terror in the general population – to

[1] National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, pp. 23-24

[2] The Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), released on February 6, 2006 introduces the term "the Long War" that lumps together the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and "a global war against violent extremism." It remains to be seen whether or not this terminology will enter the vernacular in place of "the Global War on Terrorism"

undermine public confidence, to induce counterproductive over-reaction (that builds support in the Muslim world), to change policies and ultimately to produce acquiescence to the terrorists' demands.

We will have to continue the effort to prevent, deter, and cope with the potential results of a terrorist attack for a long time. Success will be measured more in reducing the level of attacks and, in the long run, reducing the terrorists' base of support, than in dramatic successes or total elimination of Islamist terrorism worldwide, much less elimination of all forms of terrorism.

Therefore, the public must be ready to continue to support costly (and at least mildly disruptive/inconvenient) measures, assist as possible in prevention and mitigation, and, perhaps most important, absorb successful attacks without either over-reaction or massive loss in morale.

Since the immediate "rallying-round" after 9/11, there has been a substantial decline in both public confidence in the government's ability/competence to deal with terrorism and in the priority the public puts on the terrorist threat. This somewhat paradoxical movement in opinion is apparently the consequence of the absence of attacks in the US, elevating other problems as priorities, civil liberties concerns, and, probably most important, Katrina-induced perceived (and perhaps real) evidence of lack of government competence to anticipate attacks, prevent them, and limit the impact of what can't be prevented.

However, so far there is no strong public or congressional opposition to the (relatively modest) financial costs of the CT effort, nor to the non-financial burdens of CT measures – that have, in any case, had only very limited impacts on most people's lives. The real test will come if/when there is another attack. Rather than wait for that, the country should recast the CT effort – both to make it more effective and better to prepare to cope with an attack if, and when it comes.

Recasting the Counter-terrorism effort:

There must be more realism about the threat and the impossibility of preventing all attacks. No attack on the United States is a good thing, but absolute prevention is a dangerous metric of success because if/when an attack comes, its psychological effect will be magnified – and the expectation of 100% prevention will diminish attention to consequence management and vulnerability reduction.

Be clear that success will require bringing to bear the full range of instruments – military force, direct action, diplomacy, international cooperation, law enforcement, intelligence, economic and financial measures, and the criminal justice system – and citizen involvement where it can help.

Involve the private sector much more, especially in vulnerability reduction, and engage individual citizens – with more emphasis on readiness to deal with an attack and less on

impractical exhortations to "be alert" or "report suspicious activity." Many measures of "civil defense" against terrorism would also be useful in the event of natural disasters or epidemics.

Complement a robust short-term program for prevention and mitigation with a long-term effort to combat the ideology and ameliorate the underlying causes that make a seemingly repellant ideology attractive.

Recognize that the United States has other very important priorities – and that not all international problems are connected to the fight against terrorism. One of those priorities is not letting the terrorist threat rob us of our basic values – civil liberties, constitutional controls, welcoming temporary and permanent foreign visitors, and tolerance to dissent and to different cultures/religions/ethnicities.

Since prevention – long or short term – can't be perfect, increase attention to limiting the effect of a successful attack both by reducing vulnerability and improving capability to cope with the consequences of an attack.

Allocate resources by a widely understood set of priorities, not political pork or the visible appearance of "doing something." Limited resources necessitate choices resulting in a requirement to focus vulnerability reduction efforts on targets where the effects of a successful attack would be most serious. At the same time, recognize that measures that would be acceptable on an emergency basis may not be as palatable when they have to be sustained over a long period.

Prepare to respond, involving all levels of government, the private sector and the public. The synergism of such an effort will permit the design of programs and measures for a sustained effort – the "long war" is the right image. "So far, so good" is great, but not an assurance of long term success.

Recognizing that the best way to instill public confidence in the counterterrorism effort is to have a program that works, there are also "information operations" aspects to the effort:

- Acknowledge that there are real limits to the idea that the CT effort is a "war" in which "victory" is the goal
- Be candid about threats and risks – and that there are other priorities
- Include, as a key element of consequence management, preparations to provide timely and accurate information, recognizing that panic and distrust are the results the enemy will wish to foster
- Avoid "warnings" that appear more designed to protect against post-attack criticism than to produce useful responses at the time
- Continually stress that the conflict is not with Islam nor with Muslims

The War on Terrorism:

Managing Risks and Sustaining Public Support

The War on Terrorism

"We are waging a broad and unrelenting war against terror....
We are making steady progress."
– President George W. Bush, July 12, 2004[3]

"We will never back down, never give in,
and never accept anything less than complete victory."
– President George W. Bush, October 28, 2005[4]

Public Perception of the War on Terror

The attacks of September 11, 2001 wrought radical changes around the world, but most important in the United States. As it did after the unprovoked attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States has reacted vigorously and comprehensively at home and abroad, with actions that have had a profound domestic and international impact. For over four years, the United States has mounted a multi-faceted response to the terrorist threat that has directly affected all United States citizens and most of the rest of the world.

Now in early 2006, it is appropriate to consider how the U.S. public views the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), and, perhaps more important, how public support for that effort may be sustained over time.

I. Polling Data as a Measure of Public Attitudes Towards the GWOT

The United States has declared a GWOT and pledged to find and eliminate the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks and, to the maximum extent possible, to anticipate and prevent future terrorist attacks on the United States at home and abroad. As part of the GWOT, the United States has embarked on major domestic and international military and civilian actions to prevent and defend against all aspects of the terrorist threat.

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[3] "President Bush Discusses Progress in the War on Terror," Oak Ridge, Tennessee, July 12, 2004, available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/07/20040712-5.html.

[4] "President Discusses War on Terror," Norfolk, VA, October 28, 2005, available at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/10/print/20051028-1.html.

The Bush Administration has declared that the GWOT is likely to last for many years and that the ultimate aim of the effort is to restore security and confidence that the terrorist threat has been eliminated. For the most part, the American public has supported (or at least accepted as necessary) a host of increased security measures, the creation of a new Department of Homeland Security, and other programs that the Administration has promulgated in an effort to increase security against future al Qaeda and/or other terrorist attacks.

During the Atlantic Council Working Group's deliberations, we reviewed a broad section of available polling data. The following comments and the sample results included in this paper are representative of the larger body of work.

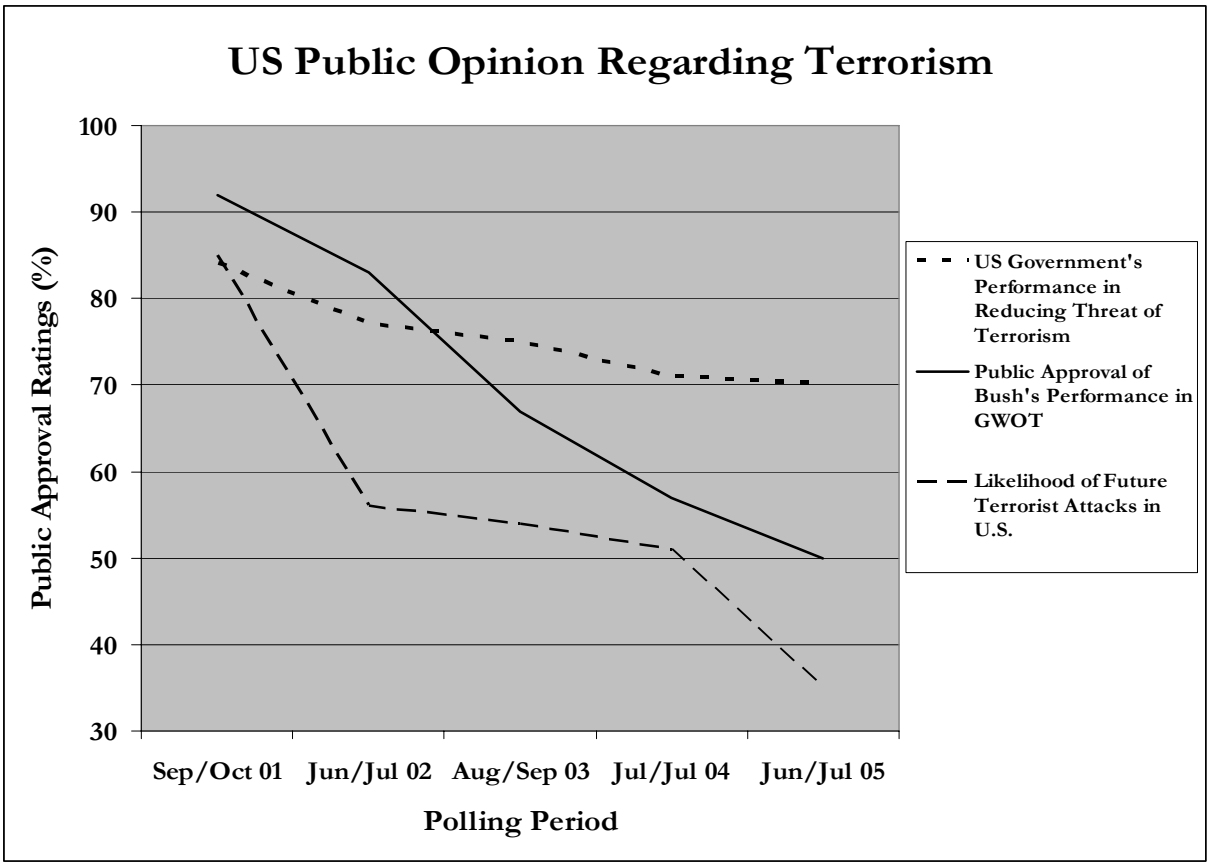
In the weeks and months following the September 11th attacks, almost every major poll indicated that President Bush enjoyed high approval ratings regarding his handling of the War on Terrorism. Most polls pegged public support for his response to terrorism between 80 and 90 percent. Since then, President Bush's support in all major polls has decreased. All polls have public support of his handling of terrorism dropping steadily from around the high 80s at the end of 2001 to current levels around 45-48 percent. The near-identical question structure of the major polls regarding this issue is an indication of high confidence in the accuracy of these figures.

The public's confidence in the US government's ability to prevent terrorism has also fallen consistently since its peak in the months following September 11, 2001. Certainly it is possible that this polling data is linked to President Bush and his handling of the GWOT, as the figures and slope of change are remarkably similar. There is a clear shift among the extremes (those who think the government is doing a great job and those who think the government is doing a poor job) from October 2001 to the present. In the final months of 2001, between 30 and 40 percent of the public had high confidence in the government's ability to protect against future terror attacks. Today, that figure is closer to ten percent.

At the same time as the public feels the Bush Administration and the government in general are not doing a particularly good job protecting the homeland from terrorism, the perception about the risk of terrorist attacks has also shifted. Intuitively, it would seem that if the public felt that the government were doing a poor job at preventing terrorist attacks, then it would perceive the risk of terrorism to be higher. However, poll numbers show that the public perceives a lesser risk of terrorism now than it did in the months following 9/11. There is a clear slope that demonstrates a shift from around 25% of the public believing a terrorist attack occurring in the following weeks and months was "very likely" to the figure of around 10-12% in late July 2005. There are two plausible explanations that could be proffered to explain this trend: (1) the fear and prioritized concern that followed the 9/11 attacks simply faded over time without major terrorist attacks within the United States; and/or (2) the terrorists are failing themselves, and the public perceives that they are unable to conduct attacks.

The concern about terrorism has also subsided, according to other polling data about priorities when voting for federal office and priorities for elected officials between 2001 and 2005. It is true that, when asked if he/she is concerned or unconcerned about terrorism, the respondents in these polls indicate they are concerned at about an 89-90% rate. However, when asked to prioritize terrorism in the context of other issues, terrorism and homeland security consistently rank considerably lower than economic and job concerns. When domestic issues such as unemployment and education are included, the public is significantly more concerned about these issues than about terrorism. This data lends credence to the theory that the public has lost some of its interest in terrorism, either as a result of other difficulties (economic or other domestic concerns becoming more important due to their effects on day-to-day life) or the absence of credible threats or actual attacks on the United States.

The following chart is a graphic representation of the results of three of the major sets of polls that clearly indicate the overall decline of both public interest and concern regarding the terrorist threat.



US Government's Performance in Reducing Threat of Terrorism - Total percentage of favorable* responses to the following query: "In general, how well do you think the U.S. government is doing in reducing the threat of terrorism: very well, fairly well, not too well, or not at all well?" - Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press survey conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International. July 13-17, 2005. Adults nationwide. (N=751, MoE ± 4)

Public Approval of Bush's Performance in GWOT - Total percentage of "approve" responses to the following query: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bush is handling the U.S. campaign against terrorism?" - Source: ABC News/Washington Post Poll. Oct. 30-Nov. 2, 2005. N=approx. 600 adults nationwide. Fieldwork by TNS.

Likelihood of Future Terrorist Attacks in U.S. - Total percentage of likely** responses to the following query: "How likely is it that there will be further acts of terrorism in the United States over the next several weeks: very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely, or not at all likely?" - Source: CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll. July 22-24, 2005. N=1,006 adults nationwide. MoE ± 3.

*- "Favorable" is defined as a "Very Well" or "Fairly Well" response to the query. Other choices included in the poll were "Not Too Well," "Not At All Well" and "Unsure"

**- "Likely" is defined as a "Very Likely" or "Somewhat Likely" response to the query. Other choices included in the poll were "Not Too Likely," "Not At All Likely" and "Unsure"

II. Gauging Public Perception

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. public has accepted and supported the GWOT that, first of all, launched Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan, and then instituted a whole host of new security measures and procedures. It has also accepted and continues to support Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), the Department of Homeland Security, the massive re-organization of the intelligence community, etc., although perhaps not with the same alacrity or degree of enthusiasm. Clearly, the majority of U.S. citizens has supported a host of very significant and costly U.S. government initiatives, especially in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. However, in the longer term, sustaining public support for some relatively unpopular measures and/or increasing costs may prove more difficult.

To date, while some measures have had a far-reaching impact, the level of sacrifice asked of the U.S. public has been limited and has not impacted day-to-day life in a substantively negative manner. Certainly, there have been inconveniences, but none that has raised significant opposition or serious public concern. Should additional, more restrictive and costly measures become necessary, the public's acceptance and tolerance level may decrease.

Should there be another serious terrorist attack, public reaction and the acceptance of attack consequences will depend greatly on the target and the severity of the attack. With that as a premise, the public's response to the major natural disaster of Hurricane Katrina can give insight into how the public wants the government to react to crises of this magnitude. The damage that resulted from Katrina was not beyond imagination. In fact, a possible natural catastrophe of that magnitude had been foreseen and even predicted. The inability by all levels of government to respond quickly and effectively in the immediate aftermath and the failure to mitigate the overall effects have raised serious concerns regarding the government's ability to cope with a terrorist attack of similar or even more severe consequences.

Given the paucity of terrorist attacks since 9/11, the public concern over terrorism is fading. In fact, Katrina highlighted the reality that there are things to be afraid of besides terrorism. It may even be said that Katrina and the potential for similar "natural" events in the future

may force some difficult resource allocation choices for the government as it seeks to gain public acceptance of restrictive and more encompassing anti-terror procedures. On the other hand, consequence management planning for terrorism could and should be relevant to other types of disasters, and vice-versa.

Overall, there are indications that the mindset of danger in the American public has shifted. The anthrax attacks in late 2001 prompted a strong public and government reaction for procedures to deal with an anthrax outbreak. Moreover, because of Katrina, SARS, or Avian flu fears, many have called for consequence management of naturally occurring disasters and/or disease outbreaks perhaps as more relevant and immediate threats to public safety. Nevertheless, there was a Working Group consensus that consequence management procedures developed to counter natural disasters will have applicability to efforts to contain or cope with deliberate, weaponized outbreaks such as anthrax. Many in the United States now understand that terrorism risks are always present, but these have now become relevant to and contextualized in how the public views the plethora of risks in their daily lives.

The above notwithstanding, the prioritization and preparation for dealing with the terrorist threat have become an important linchpin for public confidence in government. If the public, writ large, comes to believe that national priorities are established incorrectly and that measures to cope with terrorist acts are inadequate or insufficient, it will hold the government accountable for both the act of terrorism (as in lack of prevention) and for consequence management and recovery after a significant attack. Terrorism is unique in this respect, because naturally occurring diseases and disasters are not willful and deliberate acts.

An additional caution noted by the group is that, with reference to the terrorist threat, the false alarm rate is important in that repeated false alarms likely will result in public complacency that will increase the probability that precursors to a real attack will be missed or overlooked. It also prompts public speculation about the validity of intelligence information and whether or not the government really knows what it is doing.

III. Managing the Aftermath of a Terrorist Attack

A balance is required between efforts to prevent terrorist acts and sound consequence management. Even if current and future government measures to prevent a terrorist attack are highly successful, e.g., 99% of all attacks are thwarted, a successful attack that results in significant human or property loss may result in wide-spread public perceptions that the government has failed in its fundamental duty to protect the United States and its citizens. While this may be only an initial reaction prompted by the severity of the event, the government will be put on the defensive and will be pressed hard to provide explanations regarding possible intelligence failures and inadequate prevention measures, not to mention the questions and criticisms prompted by any inability to restore normality quickly and effectively.

Available surveys[5] indicate that the public has significant doubts as to the government's ability to develop and integrate effective procedures and technologies into a comprehensive disaster management plan. The public has questions as to consequence management capability at all levels of government, with questions as to "who will be in charge" not least on the list of concerns. Moreover, there are deep reservations that an effective and integrated coordination and response process exists. Is there a smooth hierarchy of authority and competent leadership that can cope with challenges ranging from relatively small local events to the much larger consequences that would result in the aftermath of a major terrorist attack? A positive and credible response to this question is key to public confidence.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, there is wide-spread public skepticism as to the government's competence to mount an effective response to any disaster (terrorist or natural). A specific area of concern is that the health care system is not prepared to deal with a major terror attack. Private sector competition, combined with the lack of an adequate number of hospital beds, physicians, and other health care professionals, ensure that health care will be a major obstacle to a successful emergency recovery. However, the most important problem and a root cause of public skepticism with disaster planning stems from the fact that it depends on, and is developed assuming the existence of the status quo medical infrastructure. It is a very real possibility, and even probability, that a devastating attack would destroy much of that infrastructure, rendering the emergency medical planning worthless.

State and local governments are critical to the consequence management effort, but if the public perceives a lack of federal leadership and clear guidelines, it may become increasingly concerned as to how homeland security funds have been allocated and expended by all levels of government. On the other hand, there also is concern that centrally controlled, federally provided funds will neither train nor equip adequately those most in need of training and equipment. While broad recognition exists that there is a finite budget, many people appear to prefer that, to the extent possible, Washington establish strong and clear guidelines while leaving the execution of plans to local authorities. Coercive, unfunded mandates emanating from federal authorities are definitely not favored.

While federal oversight may be required, people worry that regulations and guidelines on the expenditure of homeland security funds have hampered the flexibility and contribution of state and local authorities. Also, while there must be close cooperation and coordination among federal, state and local authorities, contributions should not be legislated from Washington.

Private business and industry also must become more engaged partners in terrorism prevention and consequence management. Local businesses and building managers should be brought into planning and training. Although some private enterprises have increased

[5] The surveys that form the basis for this section were all taken prior to Hurricane Katrina in order to gauge public opinion based only on considerations relevant to the GWOT and the course of its public acceptance/ support since 9/11.

their own security procedures, to date, most in the business community have not perceived a direct threat or taken a meaningful role either in planning or prevention. Indeed, private industry's role must go well beyond ensuring security of its own facilities and operations. They must be partners across the full range of risk management activities related to prevention and coping with terrorism. Private industry will, for example, be the source of many of the new technologies applicable to detecting and countering terrorist threats. Private innovators are likely to be more relevant, the more they are a part of the anti-terrorism planning and implementation process.

Perhaps most important of all, then, is a continuing campaign to inform and educate the public about terrorism. A clear understanding must exist that terrorism is inevitable and that it is impossible for the government to protect every target. In addition to the statements by senior government officials and other reminders on television and radio that the terrorist threat is real and continuous, the Working Group suggests that the Department of Homeland Security initiate a series of televised "town-hall" meetings to discuss and debate with the general public the whole range of terrorism-related issues.

It is also critically important to ensure that the public maintains the distinction between ultra-radical, violent Islamists willing to carry out terror attacks and normal, law-abiding, peaceful Muslims. Nobody knows how the public will react to another terrorist attack, but a very real possibility exists that some groups may react inappropriately towards Muslims in general. The government must protect these citizens and be clear that xenophobia and violence against Muslims is unacceptable and will be prosecuted.

Somewhat surprisingly, although serious, the number of casualties in future terrorist attacks appears not to be an overriding concern of the U.S. public. Moreover, there is a perception that, once terrorists realize that they have not been and cannot be successful in destroying the U.S.' moral fabric, terrorist recruitment will ultimately decline. The latter perception may or may not be justified.

In the final analysis, Working Group participants agreed that the U.S. public recognizes that, even if terror prevention policies are not 100% effective, very important gains may still be achieved in countering, or at least severely inhibiting, terrorist chances of success.

The Global War on Terror – Issues and Perspectives

In addition to gauging and evaluating public perceptions regarding the GWOT, the Atlantic Council Working Group considered several other key questions and issues relevant to the prosecution of the GWOT including historical aspects of the GWOT, the nature of the terrorist threat, how to change the GWOT metric, how to measure progress/success in the GWOT effort, and the severity of the CBRN[6] threat.

I. Historical Aspects of the GWOT

Prior to 9/11 the history of terrorism on U.S. soil has been limited in both number and magnitude of attacks. As the United States pursues the GWOT, policymakers have only limited examples in their search for comparable historical precedents that may serve as a guide for evaluating and predicting the impact of anti-terrorism reforms on the general public. Understanding public tolerance for reforms that may constrain civil liberties is important for making policy choices that will be supported rather than undermined.

First among events from which one may draw some useful lessons must be the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and the protracted war that followed. Most analysts agree that the traumatic impact of 9/11 was roughly equivalent to that of Pearl Harbor. The total number of casualties suffered in each attack was approximately the same, and initial popular support to the government's response was virtually unanimous. Both events were followed by a declaration of war (formal in the case of WWII and de facto in the wake of 9/11), an enemy was vilified, and a national mobilization was undertaken (albeit with fundamental and important differences in total effort, detail, and public sacrifice). Both events also resulted in some restrictions on personal liberties in order to "secure" the nation against the threat, and both events demonstrated the public's willingness to accept such restrictions in recognition of a security threat. On the other hand, in the case of WWII, some actions taken by the government were later judged to have been unwise or even illegal, e.g., the internment of Japanese nationals soon after Pearl Harbor. It remains to be seen whether or not some of the measures instituted after 9/11 will be similarly judged.

The metamorphosis over time of U.S. popular support for the Vietnam War may also provide a useful perspective on how U.S. public support for the GWOT may evolve. Although operating from a much lower popular support base from the onset of the Vietnam conflict than existed during WWII, the government's freedom of action was progressively constrained following the 1968 Tet offensive. In late 1967 and early 1968, i.e., immediately before the Tet offensive, the American public was convinced that victory was at hand and that the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese forces were all but defeated. Although Tet was a military defeat for the Viet Cong, it was a substantial psychological and political victory for the enemy and proved to be a seminal event that led to a dramatic deterioration of popular support of the U.S. war effort.

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[6] The abbreviation CBRN stands for Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, i.e., the class of weapons often referred to as weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

While there has been a decline in popular support for the GWOT, it remains to be seen whether or not the political impact of this decline will force political adjustments similar to those during the Viet Nam conflict. For the moment, the public remains tolerant and even supportive of the GWOT's domestic impact, while support for the Iraq conflict, which the Administration touts as the international frontline against terrorists, is less certain.

A brief analysis of relevant historical events leads to the following points regarding public tolerance for any sustained conflict:

- Public support is a *necessary part* of a successful war effort. If the majority of the public comes to oppose a war, sustaining morale, public and fiscal support may become increasingly difficult placing great strain on the Administration.
- How well and convincingly the Administration explains its goals and policies, how the Congress and pundits react, and how various positions are reported by the media all influence public perception.

II. The Nature of the Terrorist Threat

Objectives and Methods of Islamic Radical Terrorists[7]

Clearly, al Qaeda and its ideological progeny want the United States, and the influence of western culture, out of the Middle East, and are willing to go to terrible lengths to accomplish that objective. The events of 9/11 are seared in our memories. To some degree, the memory itself suits al Qaeda's purposes. Terror and uncertainty must be maintained over time to achieve their full effect. Without attempting to divine the thinking of murderous thugs sprung from the radical salafist, Islamist ideology, we may describe al Qaeda's objective as a change in U.S. policy – a profound change, to be sure.

Since 9/11, there has been a fundamental change in the quality of the Islamist terrorist threat, due largely to successes achieved by the GWOT. Al Qaeda and its ideological partners are no longer centrally organized and managed, but there appears to have been little change in their fundamental goals and/or guiding principles.

Today's terrorist organizations, particularly al Qaeda and its offspring, operate on an entirely different scale than "traditional" terrorists. They seek to attain their ideological goals by indiscriminate attacks that kill and maim as many people as possible in order to create the impression that legitimate governments are failing in their mission to protect their citizenry. By implication, there is the suggestion that, once the Islamist terrorists achieve their goal of ridding the Middle East of what they consider as an unacceptable foreign presence, terrorist acts will cease.[8]

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[7] While the Atlantic Council Working Group recognized that there are violent terrorists who are not radical Islamists, members agreed that the most immediate challenge and the most significant terrorist threat shaping the GWOT emanates from those Islamic radicals willing to resort to indiscriminate terrorist violence.

[8] This would, of course, not satisfy those most radical elements of Islamist terrorists whose goals envision a renewed "Caliphate" that extends from Spain to the Philippines.

The most serious terrorist threats are presented by decentralized, loosely affiliated networks, not by easily identifiable and geographically locatable formal structures. This was already true at the time of 9/11, and, as former CIA Director George Tenet reported to Congress in the summer of 2004, it has become increasingly the case since the U.S. military's massive disruption of al Qaeda operations in Afghanistan as part of OEF. As Tenet said, al Qaeda now seems to be less an organization than a movement: a source of motivation for the like-minded everywhere in the world, rather than a clearly defined organization providing equipment, training and command and control. The commuter train bombings in Madrid in 2004 as well as the July 2005 London bombings were the clearest manifestation of this trend. They were apparently not carried out at the behest of Usama bin Laden or Ayman al-Zawahiri, but were nevertheless inspired by al Qaeda's methods and rhetoric.

If the pressure brought to bear on terrorist groups by the international community in the wake of 9/11 has forced those groups to change their style of organization and operation, the information revolution has made it possible for them to make the necessary changes and to continue operating with considerable – if somewhat diminished – effectiveness. Terrorist groups have long relied on Leninist-style cell structures to ensure operational security. Modern communications allow these structures to become even more anonymous. Moreover, some groups have taken advantage of these technologies to flatten their organizational structures. They now find themselves able to operate securely without burdensome and complex levels of middle management. Using well-chosen information technology, top leaders can communicate with field operatives with the same isolation and security formerly provided by layers of intermediaries.

Likely Targets of Terrorists

In traditional conflicts, military strategists and intelligence specialists are often able to make reasonable judgments as to which targets an enemy is likely to strike, i.e., the targets or target sets are relatively predictable. Terrorists, by definition, are not bound by any constraints making the range of potential targets enormous, extending from the personal – an individual; to the physical – an aircraft, or a building, or a city; or to something less precise, e.g., the internet. These are vastly different kinds of targets, but interconnected in a way that makes events at any point on the scale reverberate throughout the whole.[9]

The most commonly recognized targets are those physical things that we hold dear; the symbols of our civilization that inspire and define our community. Because the quality of our lives is something we value, we also must defend what is now termed our "critical infrastructures." As with individual citizens, no single element can be declared expendable.
This does not mean that we must defend all equally, all the time. Those involved in the protection of that critical infrastructure have strived diligently to bring a professional approach to the concept of risk assessment to allow them to allocate scarce resources to the "most critical" of our critical infrastructures. Surely, the explosion of a major chemical plant, resulting in the deaths of many thousands is somehow worse, more horrible, than a

[9] Please note that portions of this section benefited considerably from a paper previously submitted to the Atlantic Council by Aris Pappas who also actively participated in the GWOT Working Group.

more minor attack and the deaths of tens or hundreds. So, from the perspective of the defense, the protective situation calls for something akin to triage, the prioritization of otherwise unacceptable outcomes.

What we choose to protect, however, limits the choices a terrorist might have, and, we hope, reduces potential consequences. The terrorist knows that even a limited attack, if successfully accomplished, will produce the anticipated effect of terror exacerbating feelings of insecurity and vulnerability without regard to the relative significance of the target. Indeed, the argument could be made that an attack or a series of attacks on necessarily less well-protected targets could have a greater effect than one larger attack.

Tragically, many of those things we value the most are the same things that there is little we can do to protect. Thus, the unspeakable horror of the attack on the Beslan School No. 1 in Russia. Beslan demonstrated that scale is, essentially, irrelevant. A successful attack on the smallest pre-school would stir the same feelings of loss and insecurity that would attend an assault on a university campus – perhaps more. The recent experience with the so-called "DC Snipers" is an excellent example of this relationship between a "smaller" target and significant effects. Two men, in a broken down car and armed with a single rifle managed to create a pervasive sense of fear and concern throughout the entire Washington metropolitan region.

III. Discussion

Usama bin Laden, al Qaeda, and the radical Islamist terrorists who espouse and support the al Qaeda ideology, objectives, and methods are enemies of the United States and, more broadly, of modern ideas of democracy and social equality. Their objective is to banish and eliminate Western and, in particular, U.S. influence from the Islamic world and return the region to their notion of a fundamentalist, salafist-dominated form of Islam. Terrorism is the tactic they have chosen to pursue in their quest to inflict pain and suffering on the United States and those who support the ideals of democracy. The indiscriminate and deadly violence against innocent civilians cannot, under any circumstances, be considered a legitimate means of achieving an ideological objective.[10]

The United States has raised the costs and reduced the benefits of choosing terrorism, first with a successful campaign to eliminate the terrorists' sanctuary in Afghanistan and then via relentless pursuit of the remaining terrorists, but there is little that the United States can do completely to prevent its enemies from choosing the tactic of terrorism. The key to success is to fight terrorists wherever they are found, while delegitimizing terrorism as a tool to advance any ideology or objectives.

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[10] Al Qaeda's goal of inflicting pain and suffering on civilians must be understood in the context of employing terrorism as a tactic to advance its ideological objectives. At least in principle, there are other ways that al Qaeda could advance its goals by attacking solely military targets such as the U.S.S. Cole, or partnering with states who seek to challenge the United States rather than conducting attacks on its own. These alternative tactics play to U.S. strengths, however, and so it is not surprising that al Qaeda has chosen a tactic that seeks to exploit U.S. vulnerabilities.

The ideology that motivates and energizes terrorists must be discredited. Most observers and analysts agree that the total number of dedicated and committed terrorists who adhere to the radical Islamist ideology is limited to a few thousand. However, the ideology resonates in a considerably larger Islamist community that forms the witting or unwitting terrorism support base. While terrorists may be hunted, attacked and defeated, discrediting their ideology is much more difficult. Just as there are still dedicated Marxists who survived the Cold War, there are likely to be some radical Islamists who will endure, in spite of all efforts to eliminate, or at least marginalize them to the point where they are unable to carry out their evil intent. Just as the anarchists of the early 20th Century lost their motivation and support when the conditions that spawned them no longer applied, so should there be a concerted effort not only to discredit the ideology that accepts terrorism as a valid tool, but also to eliminate the conditions that permit the ideology to flourish. In fact the seeds of its demise lie in the revolting and totally unacceptable horror of the terrorist acts perpetrated by its adherents.

Progress in the GWOT is difficult to measure or define. Does progress mean going for one year without a terrorist attack? Five years? A generation? Even if we could capture or kill every single member of al Qaeda, other groups may have learned from its example. *Terrorism cannot be defeated; it can only be minimized.*

Terrorism is a multi-faceted problem that requires a multi-dimensional response. The military is only one tool in the effort to counter and minimize the terrorist threat, and in many cases, it may not be the most important or effective choice. Terrorists need to be identified and tracked through intelligence efforts, arrested and detained through law enforcement efforts, and lose access to their resources through the interdiction of their financial support. Their actions must be discredited, not only in the eyes of their potential victims but also in those who provide shelter and support, whether that support is provided by fellow radical Muslims, international criminal elements, or a tolerant and un-engaged populace. These and other elements may at times conflict with one another, and so must be tied together through an integrated national and international policy that extends well beyond the military domain.

IV. How to Define Victory[11]

The above considerations and clarification confirm that the GWOT should be seen as a long-term ideological struggle whose successful prosecution will require all of the assets of national power. Victory in a conventional military sense is unlikely, due to the nature of the enemy and the methods he chooses to employ.[12] Thus, how U.S. officials describe national

[11] Please note that portions of this and the following section benefited from a paper prepared for the Atlantic Council by Dr. Nora Bensahel.

[12] Victory is not a straightforward concept even in traditional interstate conflicts, since unconditional surrender is historically rare. The 1991 Gulf War was widely hailed as a major victory, for example, forcing the Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait and destroying much of Iraq's military power in the process. That consensus eroded, however, as the sanctions regime continued throughout the 1990s. Many policymakers concluded that Desert Storm failed to achieve a decisive victory because Saddam Hussein remained in power. The 2003 war in Iraq was seen by many as a chance to secure the victory that had escaped the United States more than a decade earlier.

security threats and policy responses shapes public perceptions and the broader national debate about those policies.

"Combating the ideology of terrorism" may be a more appropriate appellation for the counter-terror campaign than "war" but just as the term "Cold War" became an appropriate descriptor for a lengthy and successful campaign against the ideology of communism, so the term "GWOT" may come to serve as the correct, appropriate, and internationally recognized label for the successful campaign to discredit the ideology espoused by al Qaeda and its illegitimate progeny.

One may also perceive the struggle to defeat the terrorists in terms of fighting crime. Fighting terrorism as a crime certainly must be considered a significant part of the larger whole, but defining terrorism only as crime would artificially bound the comprehensive response required to discredit the terrorists' ideology. Nevertheless, the methods and skills necessary to combat crime must be a key component of the overall effort. Combating crime requires a multi-faceted policy approach that encompasses law enforcement, localized intelligence, and attempts to address root causes. It suggests that the problem will be an ongoing one, since crime cannot be eliminated completely, but that it can be managed and, one hopes, minimized. Perhaps most important, it suggests that citizens may accept some degree of risk without fundamentally altering their lives. Most U.S. residents live in areas where the possibility of becoming a crime victim exists, and they remain vigilant, but they accept that risk without fundamentally changing the patterns of their daily lives. This is the attitude that government officials should seek to instill in the American public with respect to terrorism. They should emphasize the terms vigilance and awareness and wide-spread public involvement as a vital component of the GWOT.

The current emphasis on achieving "victory" in the GWOT may have created unrealistic expectations. To most, it implies that the risk of terrorism can be completely eliminated and that the United States will someday be free from the threat of terrorist attacks. It also places special emphasis on the importance of military efforts to counter terrorism, which may lead the public to demand visible military actions against individual terrorists rather than less visible – and potentially more effective – intelligence and law enforcement measures.

If another attack occurs within the United States (and most experts concur that another attack is all but inevitable), it will demonstrate that the threat still exists, and will call into question the signposts of progress that have been emphasized during the past several years. As a result, public support for U.S. counterterrorism policy – and confidence in the U.S. government more broadly – may deteriorate in the aftermath of another terrorist attack. As some analysts have concluded, terrorists have to be successful only once, while those who would prevent terrorists have to be right 100 percent of the time. However, if the GWOT is perceived as a longer-term comprehensive struggle similar to the Cold War, a successful future terrorist attack will be understood not as a fundamental and crippling failure of the overall counter-terrorism effort.

V. Changing the GWOT Metric

How can the U.S. government improve the sustainability of U.S. public support for its counterterrorism efforts? Accepting the validity of the following may help the government better to understand and communicate the nature of the terrorist threat and its counterterrorism efforts.

Without diminishing the value and effectiveness of efforts to date, change the GWOT emphasis and center of gravity from a perception that emphasizes military action to a more comprehensive goal of discrediting the underlying radical ideology that motivates al Qaeda and its progeny.

Although the Administration has from the beginning emphasized that the GWOT is an open-ended conflict, rhetoric that promises a victory implies a definite endpoint, while counterterrorism requires sustained and ongoing efforts. Terms such as deterrence and containment also have only limited relevance to the U.S. strategy. Deterrence through the threat of punishment seems unlikely to change the calculations of dedicated extremists who are willing to sacrifice their own lives during an attack. Deterrence through denial requires convincing such extremists that terrorism will not lead to the benefits they expect. However, if their goal is simply to inflict pain and suffering on the United States and its citizens, this strategy seems even less likely to succeed.[13] Containment is a similarly problematic concept, since terrorists are not located in any single geographic area, and they rely on ever-shifting transnational networks that can adapt to efforts to localize the phenomenon.

Emphasize that there is no such thing as absolute security from terrorist attacks. The rhetoric of victory may have instilled a false sense of promise among the American public that total security is attainable in spite of repeated warnings from local and national officials that the United States remains vulnerable to terrorist attack. Some sets of targets, such as airplanes, have certainly become harder to attack since September 11, but even those retain some degree of vulnerability. And determined terrorists can choose from an almost infinite number of potential targets.[14] Realistic and continuing appraisals of risk and of the effectiveness of government efforts will be more likely to produce sustained public support for counterterrorism efforts over the long term.

Stop citing the lack of domestic attacks as a sign of progress. The fact that no terrorist attacks have occurred in the United States since September 11, 2001, is often cited as a sign of progress in

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[13] For more on the mechanisms of deterrence, and coercion more broadly, see David E. Johnson, Karl P. Mueller, and William H. Taft, V, *Conventional Coercion Across the Spectrum of Operations*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, MR-1494-A, 2002, Chapter 2; and Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, Chapter 3.

[14] The Department of Homeland Security has reportedly developed a list of more than 80,000 potential targets within the United States, a number that is so large as to render the list meaningless. Even a list of targets that was a fraction of that size would be virtually impossible to prioritize. See Mimi Hall, "Terror List Way Behind," *USA Today*, December 9, 2004; and "Department Struggling to Rank 80,000 Sites," ABCNews.com, December 9, 2004, available at http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/story?id=316360.

the counterterrorism effort. The reality, however, is that it is impossible to determine the exact reasons for the absence of attacks. It might be due to proactive measures – both defensive and offensive – that the U.S. government has taken, but it could also be due to strategic choices made by al Qaeda and other international terrorist groups. They might be deliberately targeting other countries, they may be reprioritizing their resources, or they may have chosen to wait several years between attacks on the United States. We simply do not know what has caused the absence of attacks, because the fact that they have not attacked us in over four years does not mean that they *cannot* do so. The more that the lack of attacks is cited as a metric of progress, the more likely it is that public confidence in counterterrorism policies and in the government itself will fall if/when there is another attack.

Explain the changing nature of the threat. Al Qaeda is not the same as it used to be; it has morphed and changed over time. We lack reliable information about its current organizational structure, but we do know that the organization has become more decentralized over time. This means that capturing or killing individual al Qaeda leaders will not disrupt the organization's activities as much as it has in the past. While U.S. officials should continue their efforts in these areas, they should remain circumspect about their possible effects. Similarly, some of the most notable recent attacks – including the March 2004 Madrid bombings and the July 2005 London bombings – appear to have been conducted by local cells with no known organizational ties to al Qaeda. The more that the U.S. public understands the ways in which the terrorist threat has changed since the September 11 attacks, the better equipped it will be to identify suspicious behavior and to evaluate the government's counter-terror policies.

Engage in a public discussion about U.S. defensive measures against terrorism and the tradeoffs they entail. This may be one of the most important measures that the U.S. government can take to sustain public support for counterterrorism efforts in the long run. Defensive counterterrorism measures include some very difficult, and sometimes unpleasant, decisions and tradeoffs.

What sites should be protected? There are an almost unlimited number of potential terrorist targets in the United States. It is neither practical nor desirable to harden every airport, seaport, power plant, government building, shopping mall, and school, to name a few possibilities, against possible attack. The American public needs to become actively involved in debates and decisions about how counterterrorism resources should be allocated at the local, state, and national levels, since in the aftermath of any future terrorist attack, questions are sure to arise about why that particular target was not adequately protected.

How much money should be invested in counterterrorism? Every dollar spent on counterterrorism is a dollar that could be spent on something else – for example, health care, reducing taxes, or improving schools. Furthermore, every dollar spent on protecting Americans against terrorism is a dollar that could be spent on protecting Americans from other dangers. The more that public debate influences these tradeoff decisions, the more sustainable any resulting policy choices will likely be.

How should counterterrorism dollars be spent? Even if it were possible to determine an optimal level of counterterrorism spending, serious debates would remain about the specific allocation of those dollars. As an example, according to its web site, the mission of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is "to protect the nation's transportation systems by ensuring the freedom of movement for people and commerce."[15] This includes both aviation security and surface transportation security, according to the agency's own budget categories. Yet of its $5.4 billion budget in 2005, $4.57 billion, or 85 percent, was devoted to aviation security. Surface transportation security received just $115 million, or 0.02 percent of the budget.[16] Is this allocation of resources sufficient, given the relative vulnerabilities of the two sectors? While there can be no definitive answers to this question, it seems reasonable to contend that public support for government efforts in the aftermath of an attack on surface transportation would be more robust if the public had thoroughly debated this question before the attack – even if the debates did not result in a reallocation of these resources.

What is the appropriate trade-off between counterterrorism measures and civil liberties? Americans have been asking this question since shortly after the September 11 terrorist attacks, as measures such as the USA Patriot Act were enacted. A public that might have supported holding detainees in Guantanamo Bay within the first few months after the end of combat operations in Afghanistan may no longer support detaining those same individuals now that they have remained in detention for three to four years without any prospects of either trial or release. Reports alleging that the CIA maintains a secret network of prisons around the world have rekindled this debate, about which many Americans feel very strongly.[17] Support for any government counterterrorism policy cannot be sustained if the majority of the American people come to believe that those policies violate the very principles that this country stands for.

Balancing these tradeoffs is a very challenging task, since there are no easy answers, and some of them address the very question of what it means to be an American. Citizens who have actively participated in debates and decisions about these tradeoffs will be more likely to continue supporting government counterterrorism efforts in the aftermath of an attack than those who do not understand the consequences of the difficult tradeoffs that have been made.

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[15] See http://www.tsa.gov/public/display?theme=7.

[16] Comparable figures for the TSA's 2006 budget request show that the gap between the two sectors is increasing. Out of a total budget request of $5.6 billion, TSA allocated $4.9 billion, or 89 percent, to aviation security, and $32 million, or 0.006 percent, to surface transportation security. (The remaining budget allocations are for Transportation Security Support, which includes expenditures that are not particular to any sector, such as intelligence, headquarters administration, and IT support.) See "FY 2006 TSA Budget Request," February 2005, available at http://www.tsa.gov/interweb/assetlibrary/ FY2006Budget_Brief.ppt.

[17] Dana Priest, "CIA Holds Terror Suspects in Secret Prisons," *Washington Post*, November 2, 2005.

Measuring Progress/Success and the Adequacy of the GWOT Effort

Defining progress and success in the prosecution of the GWOT within the United States is an uncertain science at best. Since the 9/11 attack, the U.S. government has undertaken extraordinary measures designed to prevent, and guard against another major terrorist attack. Yet, no one in the United States is prepared to state that the measures thus far instituted are sufficient to prevent another attack. Others categorically state that the nature of terrorists and the wide range of potential targets make the prevention of a future terrorist attack all but impossible.

The American public has become actively involved in the terrorism detection and prevention process. Campaigns that promote public awareness and request the public's cooperation in identifying potential perpetrators, alerting civil authorities to unusual behavior, in noting and reporting packages and other containers that may contain explosive devices, etc., all serve to alert and sensitize all Americans to the potential terrorist threat. Well-publicized exercises that test and evaluate local, state, and national prevention and response capabilities promote public awareness and some degree of confidence that progress in preventing and/or coping with the consequences of another major terrorist attack is being achieved. Moreover, realistic and continuing appraisals of risk and of the effectiveness of government efforts that are widely communicated to the public will likely result in sustained public support for counterterrorism efforts over the long term.

In addition, the public has become and should continue to be engaged in discussions and decisions about how counterterrorism resources are to be allocated at the local, state, and national levels. Americans have become aware of and concerned about the allocation of resources and how taxpayer funds are distributed and used. Keeping the public well informed may result in popular "buy-in" and the belief that the general public is a part of the solution to the terrorist threat.

Given the nature of the terrorist threat, deciding on measures of effectiveness for the GWOT becomes a challenging proposition. As has been mentioned, one frequently cited measure of effectiveness is that there has been no terrorist attack within the United States since 9/11. But, as already noted, the fact that there have been no new attacks cannot be taken as an affirmation of continued success. Another measure of success is that there have been a significant number of arrests and intense investigations that have led to the detention/arrest of terrorist suspects both in the United States and abroad.

However, as many who are concerned about the future terrorist threat have pointed out, it is difficult to define empirical measurements of effectiveness and to go beyond these two rather general points. This conclusion may well change if the campaign to discredit the ideology of terrorism achieves meaningful success. Measuring success as a result of an ideological struggle will certainly be different from how success is measured in a more conventional campaign.

Potential Terrorist Use of a CBRN Weapon

As a special item of interest, the Atlantic Council Working Group deliberated on the potential that terrorists may acquire and use mass destruction weapons – Chemical, Biological, Radiological, or Nuclear (CBRN). While it was generally agreed that al Qaeda and other terrorist groups will seek to acquire CBRN weapons and that, once in their possession, they will not hesitate to use them, there also was a consensus that the use of such weapons is far less likely than more "conventional" terrorist weapons (including suicide terrorism).

Multiple sources have confirmed al Qaeda's (or other terrorists') willingness to employ a CBRN weapon for the purpose of causing mass casualties and, if possible, panic and fear among the general population should they be successful in obtaining such a capability. Al Qaeda documents found in Afghanistan and elsewhere make it clear that its adherents will not hesitate, and even consider it a religious duty, to use CBRN weapons. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that, though less likely than conventional weapons, there is a major qualitative and psychological impact on the general population that would result from use of a CBRN weapon, even if such use produces relatively few casualties. In the latter case, the public sense of vulnerability and failure by government at all levels to protect against a mass destruction device will likely produce a far more fearful reaction among the general public than a conventional attack that resulted in greater casualties.

A qualitative difference exists within the general category of CBRN weapons in that not all weapons or capabilities within this class are of equal concern. Terrorist acquisition and use of a nuclear weapon clearly poses the greatest danger but it is also the least likely by several orders of magnitude. Radiological weapons could certainly pose a substantial risk and danger to a large population, but also pose some severe risks to those who would employ them, not to mention serious difficulties in acquisition and pre-deployment handling of the radioactive materials. Similarly, biological agents, as living and highly dangerous organisms, require extra care and impose special handling and delivery requirements. Toxic chemicals may be the most readily available agents within the CBRN category but here those who would employ them face difficult challenges not least of which is that many law enforcement agencies have received HAZMAT training and are prepared to cope with a wide range of chemical incidents.

I. Nuclear weapons[18]

The term "nuclear weapon" is used to describe two types of devices: an atomic or fission weapon and a thermonuclear or hydrogen one. Although terrorist acquisition of the latter capability can not be totally ruled out, the chances are so remote as to be virtually zero. The original manufacture of an atomic fission weapons is also unlikely. As a consequence, the

[18] The section on the likelihood that terrorists may acquire and use CBRN weapons draws on a paper prepared for the Atlantic Council by Dr. Darryl Howlett and Dr. Jez Littlewood of the UK's University of Southampton. An earlier version of their paper was presented at a conference organized by the Atlantic Council in Brussels, Belgium.

far more likely means by which a terrorist group may acquire a nuclear weapon is via the theft, capture, or purchase of a weapon produced by a state.

In principle, it remains possible for a highly motivated and financially well-endowed terrorist organization to acquire the technical abilities necessary to manufacture an ignition mechanism for a nuclear explosive device. Most analysts would agree that only an international group with global resources and strong motivation could undertake an operation of this kind. Before its defeat in and expulsion from Afghanistan, Al Qaeda probably was the only network with all the requisite characteristics to pursue nuclear terrorism either by acquiring or developing a nuclear weapon.

A means of delivering the device would also need to be found. A terrorist group would not use a ballistic missile as the method of delivery. Rather, it would be a case of bringing any device in by sea, a navigable river, air, or via a land route.

Notwithstanding the difficulties terrorists would face in acquiring nuclear weapons, the principal lesson is that preventing access to highly enriched uranium, plutonium, and the materials required for an operational nuclear device, is the key to stemming nuclear terrorism.

II. Radiological Weapons or Radiological Dispersal Device (RDD)

Radiological weapons and RDDs usually involve conventional high explosive in combination with a radioactive material. In theory, both elements of this category of weapons are more accessible to terrorists than those used in nuclear weapons, as conventional explosives like Semtex can be obtained while the sources of radioactive materials could be found in industrial, medical, and power-generating locations. [19]

The material could originate from a nuclear reactor in the form of used fuel rods or the waste produced; from medical uses in hospitals for cancer treatment; agricultural use to sterilize pests and preserve fresh food; and industrial purposes to examine welds and for oil well logging. Thus, many radioactive sources exist and radiological sources of this nature may be accessible, relatively small and safe, and consequently easily portable when placed in a shielded container.

An additional concern in this context is the potential for sabotage of research reactors. In 2003, for example, specialists in this area concluded that terrorists could do considerable damage through a sabotage attack on a research reactor of medium or larger size, and that these reactors are generally not as well protected from outside attackers as nuclear power reactors. The consequences of a successful sabotage attack could be significant radioactive release and contamination of an area near the reactor site. Since many research reactors, unlike most power reactors, are located within or close to populated areas, they may present

[19].For a discussion of the issues see, UNIDIR, *Disarmament Forum* 2003: 2 (May)

a greater threat of disruption to the public from a sabotage attack than do most power reactors. [20]

III. Biological Weapons

A biological weapon is essentially the deliberate use of disease and includes *any* biological agent – whether bacteria, virus, fungi or other – although clearly only some pathogens are of real utility in terms of biological warfare and/or bioterrorism. Bioterrorism should not, however, be understood as only encompassing human or zoonotic pathogens, but must include anti-animal and anti-plant pathogens. The latter elements have generally been brought together under the term agricultural terrorism, given that the likely targets are related to crops and animal husbandry. [21]

Sources of the pathogens exist across the world in culture collections, laboratories, civil and military facilities, and naturally in the environment. The possibility of unrestricted access to the pathogens is therefore theoretically high, but this must be tempered with the degree of knowledge required to exploit a pathogen to achieve the desired objective. Within the context of general concerns about the potentially devastating consequences of bioterrorism, the following should be considered:

- The theoretical potential of biological agents as weapons has been based on extensive studies of the *military quantity* and *military quality* of a pathogen, usually delivered via an aerosol. The outcome here is likely to be in the thousands, and possibly hundreds of thousands, of casualties: but, even then meteorological and environmental conditions could affect the overall effectiveness of the weapon.
- There is no large-scale deliberate use of biological weapons documented in history that has produced hundreds of thousands of casualties. There are, however, a number of naturally occurring outbreaks of disease that have produced such numbers of deaths.

IV. Chemical weapons

From a military perspective the West has been dealing with the threat posed by chemical weapons for many years, but investigation of the use of toxic chemicals has been a regular law enforcement issue for an even greater length of time. It is important to note that here we are talking about all chemical agents because under the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention 'toxic chemical' means: Any chemical which through its chemical action on life processes can cause death, temporary incapacitation or permanent harm to humans or animals. The main point is that *any* chemical and not simply those referred to as classic chemical weapons may pose a threat.

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[20].George Bunn, Chaim Braun, Alexander Glaser, Edward Lyman, Fritz Steinhausler, 'Research Reactor Vulnerability to Sabotage by Terrorists' *Science and Global Security* 11 (2003) p.103.

[21]. The best example of the potential impact of this type of terrorism is the 2001 Foot and Mouth virus (FMV) outbreak in the United Kingdom, which was a natural occurrence of FMV. See: Virginia Gewin, 'Agricultural Shock' *Nature* 421 9 January 2003, pp106-108; Mark Townsend, 'Bioterrorists may mount foot and mouth attack' *Observer* 5 January 2003, p.8

Concerns over chemical terrorism increased after the attacks by Aum Shinrikyo in Japan, notably on the Tokyo subway system in 1995. However, despite the extensive amount of money spent by Aum Shinrikyo to research, develop, and produce chemical weapons on Japanese territory, the quality of the Sarin produced was deemed to have been poor (at least in Tokyo). Concern over potential terrorist use of chemical weapons increased following the anthrax incident in the United States in October-November of 2001. These fears were enhanced when the military intervention in Afghanistan produced evidence of an al Qaeda interest in CBRN.

V. Scoping the CBRN Threat

Basing the immediate future on assessments of the past is fraught with difficulty, but in the area of CBRN it is also necessary. Although there is no linear progression of lethality and terrorist use of CBRN on which accurate predictions or threat assessments can be made, there is value in taking account of the past when assessing the current and future threat.

The evidence of terrorist interest in CBRN weapons certainly exists: but the evidence suggests that the current CBRN threat would appear to be based on fairly basic and crude weapons. Of course, the groups involved may have learnt lessons by reading the open literature and threat assessments produced since 2001 and might have already developed – or be developing – a more sophisticated approach to CBRN.

Much of the information that is available in the public domain cannot be comprehensively validated, but a range of groups and individuals have historically expressed an interest in or attempted to develop CBRN weapons. This includes, left wing groups (Weather Underground (1970); Red Army Faction (1980)); radical ecoterrorists (R.I.S.E. (1972)); religious cults (Rajneeshees (1984); Aum Shinrikyo (1995)); national liberation movements (Tamil Guerrillas (1980); and right-wing, Aryan, and Christian fundamentalists (Minnesota Patriots Council (1991); individuals such as Larry Wayne Harris (1995 & 1998); Chechen groups (mid-1990s onwards); radical Islamists (1988 onwards); as well as opportunistic individuals or criminals as in the 1972 Oak Ridge incident.

VI. Conclusions on the CBRN Threat

What can be extrapolated from the limited available evidence is that the most significant challenges, at least for the immediate future are at the lower end of the CBRN spectrum. Here we are talking about the everyday chemicals and other materials widely available in civil, industrial, and municipal facilities.

Furthermore, in considering the choice of weapon in the future, increases in the number of casualties and disruption have been achieved with conventional rather than CBRN weapons. In terms of technology, acquisition, costs and funding, transport, and deployability, conventional weapons may still be regarded as the 'superior' weapon of choice as such weapons can achieve the required symbolism in an attack. This could change, and may

already be changing, as the capacity to develop new weapons becomes available through globalization and technological revolution.

In conclusion, it is vital to highlight the critical trends that are shaping this problem as it evolves and that are likely to make the problem considerably more difficult in the future by diminishing existing technical barriers. These trends include:

- The rapid advance of science and technology. In the life sciences (including chemistry and biology) we are witnessing advances in knowledge at an incredible speed. The more we know, the more options we have – for both good and ill. An example is the matching of combinatorial chemistry and high-throughput screening for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of new drug discovery techniques. This process is producing a rapidly growing catalogue of new molecules, some of which are incredibly toxic. They may or may not be useful as the basis for new drugs, but having been discovered, they could perhaps be used by those with malevolent intent.
- The global diffusion of the relevant science and technology. The West does not have a monopoly on this science, and the relevant knowledge and technology is spreading rapidly around the world for perfectly legitimate commercial, health, and other reasons. Today, a major scientific breakthrough could come from almost anywhere. The result is that more and more capabilities are coming within the competence of more and more people around the world.
- Globalization, including these two trends, is changing the structure and operations of international chemical and biotechnology industries. Those changes, which include more flexible operations, flatter organizational pyramids, and empowered employees, contribute to creating a very different environment within which efforts to address the challenge of the potential terrorist use of these capabilities have to be implemented. Together, they make it much more difficult to identify illicit behavior and activities.

Working Group on The War on Terrorism: Managing Risks and Sustaining Public Support

This report is the product of the deliberations of an Atlantic Council Working Group convened to consider how the actions the United States has taken in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks have been perceived by the American public, how public support may be sustained over time, and to address other topics concerning the prosecution of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). The Working Group held several meetings from June 2005 through January 2006 to address these issues. While not all Working Group participants agree fully with each and every point in this report, it presents a general consensus on the most important questions. It also should be noted that the views of the Working Group members do not represent the official position of any institution.

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