

Submitted to the Op Ed page

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One of the many depressing features of the present crisis is that we do not have an adequate vocabulary for describing it. Are we at “war”? Have we suffered a “military attack”? Is the Taliban our “enemy”? Or is it rather that a “crime” has been committed, and we ought to seek United Nations help and “use diplomatic means to bring the criminals to justice”?

Our inability to describe the situation is a symptom of a deeper misperception. Most of the public discussion I have heard in both the United States and Europe is based on the belief that because our actions are a result of the eleventh of September, that is what they are about, that we should primarily be seeking justice or revenge or some such. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Our actions should be directed at, for example, the 18th of July 2008. On that date six teams of terrorists working in six major American cities simultaneously detonate nuclear bombs whose parts have been carefully smuggled into the country over the years and whose assemblies and detonations have been coordinated. That attack kills over five million Americans. The nuclear attack is itself the follow up to several years of germ and biological warfare. Those who wish to kill us learn from their mistakes. Just as the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center benefited from the mistakes of the 1993 attack, so the anthrax pandemic of 2003 benefits from the blunders made by the early primitive mailbox anthrax of 2001. However, even after the pandemic of 03, it is obvious that anthrax is an inefficient method of biological genocide, because it is treatable. It is not until the PTP germ warfare of late 2003 and 2004 that fatal and untreatable germs are introduced in sufficient quantities to produce over a million U.S. fatalities. These

weapons had been prepared in Iraqi laboratories in the years following the abandonment of UN inspections.

If these scenarios seem to you exaggerated, ask yourself what you would have said if someone had told you on September first that within two weeks the World Trade Towers would cease to exist. Or better still read the New York Times. On October 28th it reported a Muslim cleric as claiming that “Islamic extremists . . . had bought more than twenty nuclear warheads and were paying Soviet scientists to break them into chips that could be carried in suitcases.” (p.B5).

Given the certainty that these people wish to destroy us, and the probability that they will use increasingly effective explosive, chemical, biological, and nuclear means to do it, what is an intelligent response on our part?

1. We need to give up on the fantasy that we are going to find Bin Laden hiding in a cave, and when we do so, our troubles will be over. Unless he is betrayed by his confederates or is very stupid, it is very unlikely that we will capture or kill Osama Bin Laden. When the Taliban falls he will slip away to some other friendly haven. And even if we should be lucky enough to capture or kill him, that is not the end of the conflict. There will be plenty of others, perhaps reinspired by his martyrdom, to take up where he left off.

2. We need to give up on the illusion that there is some policy change on our part that will change the attitude of the terrorists. Short of all of us converting to an extreme version of fundamentalist Islam and driving all the Israelis into the sea, there is no policy change that will alter their determination to kill us. The policy changes that are urged on us – stop the bombing, use the United Nations, etc. – might peel off some of their moderate supporters but will not weaken the resolve of the terrorists.

3. We need to remove, one by one, those governments that continue to give the terrorists a territorial base, organizational support and financial aid. That, I take it, is what we are now trying to do in Afghanistan. Perhaps if we inflicted a stunning defeat on the Taliban and installed a broad based government, other nations in the region would get the message, and diplomatic means alone would lead them to drive the terrorists out into the open. Does that sound likely to you? Much more likely is a long and bitter struggle in Afghanistan and several other such struggles elsewhere. The point of the struggles is that

without a territorial base, the terrorists are reduced to a gang of criminals on the run. As long as they have a territorial base they can continue to hit us at the times and places, and with the means, of their choosing.

4. While we, along with the British, are going to do most of the fighting, we need to keep reminding other governments and especially Islamic governments that we are all in this together. Our enemies want to make the conflict appear to be between America and Islam. We must continue to fight against any such misperception.

5. We need to understand the motives of our adversaries. Both sides survived the cold war because both sides wanted to live. This conflict is different. Our adversaries are members of a death cult, who, as one of their leaders said, “want to die the way Americans want to live”.

6. Perhaps most important, we need to get an intellectual grip on on the structure of history of the events that are unfolding. The conflict did not start on September 11th. It has been going on for over thirty years, and it is likely to last at least another thirty years. One of the reasons for our present predicament is that our responses to earlier assaults were so feeble. The taking of the hostages in Iran, the Lockerbie bombing of Pan Am 103, the destruction of our embassies in Africa, the bombing of the destroyer Cole, the attempted assassination of former President Bush, the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center– all were met with no, or only limited and inadequate, retaliation. Given this history, September 11th should not seem surprising. It should seem inevitable. Our greatest need is to understand the nature and permanence of the struggle we are now in.