

Unconquerable Nation

**Knowing Our Enemy
Strengthening Ourselves**

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How We Prevail

Secret Service agents gunned down the first team of assassins before they got to the President, but it was a close call. A second team of gunmen managed to get into the House of Representatives, where they wounded five congressmen. A terrorist bomb caused damage but no casualties at the Senate. Troops took up positions at the Capitol and the White House, both of which had been set ablaze. By sundown, Washington was sliding out of control; columns of black smoke could be seen for miles. Authorities were unable to save the White House, which was completely destroyed by fire.

In New York City, a huge vehicle bomb exploded on Wall Street, killing 33 people and wounding more than 400. Another bomb exploded in downtown Los Angeles, killing at least 20. Yet another bomb killed and maimed hundreds in the heartland. An explosion leveled a Texas town, while fires destroyed most of Chicago and San Francisco.

That was not as bad, however, as an inexplicable deadly epidemic that hit the nation's capital in the summer. By autumn, one-tenth of the city's population had died. Similar deadly outbreaks swept across the country. Nationwide, 1 in 200 Americans died. Cities announced their own blockades against those fleeing the stricken areas. The fabric of society was unraveling with riots and looting.

Following riots, the Army patrolled the streets in Washington, Detroit, and Los Angeles; 120,000 people were interned as potential subversives. The worst crisis, however, was the receipt of a credible nuclear threat.

All this is not some hypothetical future terrorist scenario invented by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to test preparedness, the screenplay for a new Hollywood disaster thriller, or a survivalist fantasy. All of the events listed above, in fact, occurred during the course of America's history.

In 1950, assassins tried to rush Blair House, where President Truman was staying while renovations were under way at the White House. In 1954, terrorists opened fire on the House of Representatives. A bomb caused heavy damage to the Senate in 1983. And British troops burned down the White House and part of the newly constructed Capitol building in 1814, when only a rainstorm saved the rest of Washington.

A horse-drawn cart filled with explosives (an early vehicle bomb) blew up on Wall Street in 1920, and suspected members of the Dynamite Conspiracy set off a huge bomb in Los Angeles in 1910. Timothy McVeigh's bomb killed 168 people in Oklahoma City in 1995.

In 1947, a ship loaded with nitrate fertilizer blew up, leveling Texas City. The city of Chicago was destroyed by fire in 1871. San Francisco was destroyed by fire following the 1906 earthquake.

In 1793, yellow fever killed 5,000 people, one-tenth of the total population of Philadelphia, which at the time was the nation's capital. Subsequent yellow fever and cholera outbreaks killed thousands in American cities during the nineteenth century, but none of these outbreaks compared with the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918–1919, which killed approximately 600,000 people in the United States and between 25 and 50 million worldwide.

Race riots required calling out the National Guard and federal troops in a number of cities in the second half of the twentieth century. I personally watched the columns of smoke through a train window as the train pulled out of Union Station in Washington, DC, on April 14, 1968, at the beginning of the widespread race riots following the assassination of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. During World War II, 120,000 Japanese-Americans were interned.

The most terrifying incident of the Cold War, the Cuban missile crisis, occurred in 1962, when the two superpowers stood nose to

nose, armed forces on high alert on both sides, nuclear weapons at the ready.

America's Dark Moments

There have been many dark moments in America's history. Almost everyone's short list includes the destruction of the World Trade Center towers on September 11, 2001; the December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor and World War II; the Civil War; the 1929 stock market crash and the Great Depression; the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Most Americans would also include the burning of the nation's capital by British troops in 1814, the Chicago fire, the Johnstown flood, the San Francisco earthquake, and the Spanish flu and other epidemics.

Loss of life is the common element in all these crises. For a nation seen by many in the world as bellicose, Americans themselves see the casualties of war as disaster. The Civil War, in which 558,000 died, tops the list, followed by World War II with 407,000 Americans dead, World War I with 117,000 U.S. deaths, the Vietnam War with 58,000 Americans dead, and the Korean War with 37,000 Americans dead. And whatever criticism we may heap upon our presidents while they are in office, we are angered and dismayed when they are physically attacked.

We also include poverty and suffering among our darkest historical moments. Noteworthy are the events that represent the lack or loss of values: slavery and continuing racial discrimination, the annihilation and dispossession of native Americans, the ruthless suppression of striking workers in the nineteenth century, the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, the "witch hunts" for communists in the 1950s, the Watergate scandal in the 1970s. The singling out of these events as America's dark moments reflects the values Americans hold dear: life, the inalienable rights of all people, equal justice for all, security in its broadest sense, fair play, political morality.

Just as noteworthy are the omissions. Americans do not dwell much on abstract issues such as past humiliations (including those in Vietnam and Iran), perceived insults to national honor, challenges to the nation's rightful place in the world, assaults upon our religious beliefs and moral values. These are the types of concerns voiced by our terrorist adversaries.

It is also noteworthy that Americans view the nation's dark moments as summons to courage, opportunities to reflect and to do what is right. Each dark moment is seen as a challenge, awful at the time, but ultimately met—not a descent into darkness.

As the United States faces a new array of threats that arose at the end of the Cold War and were so stunningly clarified on September 11, 2001, Americans are again summoned to demonstrate courage, to draw upon deep traditions of determination in the face of risk, to show self-reliance and resiliency. There has been too much fear-mongering since 9/11. We are not a nation of victims cowering under the kitchen table. We cannot expect protection against all risk. Too many Americans have died defending liberty for us to easily surrender it now to terror.

We should heed the admonition that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivered in his 1933 inaugural address: “Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.”

It should not be fear that propels us, but confidence that we will ultimately prevail. We have never been driven forward by fear. At our best, we have been defined by our visions.

Strategy for an Unconquerable Nation

The title of this book is *Unconquerable Nation*. The phrase derives from a quote by the ancient Chinese strategist Sun Tzu, who 25 centuries ago wrote, “Being unconquerable lies with yourself.”¹ The choice of this title does not signal an attempt to apply the principles of Sun Tzu's ancient treatise on the art of war to the current war on

terrorism. Sun Tzu's passages tend to be abstract, cryptic, sometimes opaque, and therefore subject to continuous interpretation, which may, in part, explain their enduring appeal.

Sun Tzu offers inspiration, not precise instructions. His philosophy of war is straightforward. Warfare, which had by the 5th century B.C. become a large-scale enterprise, requires popular support and proper strategy. That strategy must be based on a thorough understanding of the enemy and of one's own strengths and weaknesses. "Being unconquerable" means knowing oneself, but as understood by the ancient strategists, "knowing" means much more than the mere acquisition of knowledge. "Knowing oneself" means preserving one's spirit, a broad term. "Being unconquerable" includes not only disciplined troops and strong walls, but also confidence, courage, commitment—the opposite of terror and fear.

One can easily see the appeal of this construct in the context of current circumstances. This philosophy alters Americans' mental model of today's conflict. It elevates the necessity of knowing the enemy, something we have not made sufficient effort to do. It moves us from relying almost exclusively on the projection of military power and viewing homeland security as physical protection to mobilizing our spirit, courage, and commitment. While we strive to destroy our terrorist enemies by reducing their capabilities, thwarting their plans, frustrating their strategy, and crushing their spirit, we must also rely on our own psychological strength to defeat the terror they would create. Instead of issuing constant warnings and alarms, we must project stoicism and resolve. Instead of surrendering our liberties in the name of security, we must embrace liberty as the source and sustenance of our security.

Looking Back

This book is based in part on objective research, particularly as it applies to knowing the enemy, and it also includes the personal reflections of someone who has thought about terrorism for a long time. I initiated RAND's research on terrorism in 1972 with a simple memo-

randum, which observed that this phenomenon was likely to spread and increase and could create serious problems for the United States and its allies; I proposed that we should therefore take a serious look at it.

It required little prescience to make that statement in 1972. By then, Palestinian extremists had already begun to sabotage and hijack airliners; urban guerrillas in Latin America were regularly kidnapping foreign diplomats and demanding the release of their imprisoned comrades, a tactic that quickly spread to Europe and the Middle East; the first terrorist groups had appeared in Europe and Japan; and terrorist bombings had become increasingly common. One had only to take a few small steps beyond the headlines of the day to see these disparate tactics merging to form a new mode of conflict.

Certainly, I was not able to foresee the remarkable trajectory of terrorism over the next three and one-half decades. I did not forecast terrorists holding hostage Olympic athletes, OPEC oil ministers, hundreds of passengers aboard a cruise ship, guests at an embassy party in Lima, or hundreds of theatergoers in Moscow; bombs on trains and subways in Paris, Moscow, Madrid, Manila, and London; nerve gas on Tokyo's subways; the Senate Office Building contaminated with anthrax; huge truck bombs exploding in the center of London and the middle of Oklahoma; suicide bombers strapped with explosives walking into restaurants, shopping malls, buses, and hotel lobbies or driving trucks into embassies, synagogues, and mosques; jumbo jets blown out of the sky; hijacked planes flown into skyscrapers. Any predictions of these terrible events would have been dismissed in 1972 as the stuff of fantasy and hysteria.

Longevity in a particular subject matter does not guarantee wisdom or insight, but it does permit perspective. It provides a firsthand opportunity not only to recall events, but to recall what else was going on during each event—a difficult war in Vietnam, a crisis in the Middle East, another Cold War confrontation—providing a context that newcomers to a subject sometimes miss.

It is wrong, for example, to view the history of America's previous efforts to counter terrorism through the dust and debris of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, as some government officials have done. The

scale of those attacks completely altered the context in which subsequent decisions were made. Responses that were unimaginable before 9/11 became mandatory afterwards. The world changed. Yet we had also learned valuable lessons during the three decades of counter-terrorist efforts prior to 9/11. While 9/11 demanded new responses, all that we had done beforehand was not mistaken or futile.

At the same time, longevity imposes humility. Thirty years ago, I thought I knew more about terrorism and knew it with far greater certainty than I do today. Beneath the patina of authority that comes with time, a long perspective obliges one to review and revise one's own earlier forecasts and conclusions.

The Growth of Terrorism Research

Terrorist tactics have a long history, but contemporary international terrorism is a relatively recent phenomenon. The first airline hijacking for political ends occurred in 1968, and the first successful kidnapping of a diplomat by urban guerrillas in modern times took place in 1969. The two events that galvanized worldwide concern and led, in the United States, to the creation of the Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism—the Lod Airport massacre in Israel and the murder of athletes at the Munich Olympics—occurred in 1972. These events mark the beginning of terrorism as a new mode of conflict.

The term “international terrorism” was not created by its practitioners; it was an artificial term invented by analysts. In the early 1970s, participants in ongoing wars sometimes employed terrorist tactics; indeed, the entire repertoire of some small urban guerrilla groups fell into the category of terrorism. Some terrorist events spilled over into the international domain in the form of hijackings, attacks on foreign targets, or terrorists themselves going abroad to pursue their campaigns. All these events were aggregated into a separate field of political violence.

The initial concern of Americans was not the conflicts themselves; rather, we were concerned with preventing the conflicts from spilling over into the international domain. Uruguayans kidnapping

other Uruguayans in Uruguay was unfortunate, but it was a matter for the local authorities. Uruguayans kidnapping foreign diplomats, on the other hand, became an international matter. I mention this as a caution to those who may reach too far in attempts to correlate the incidence of terrorism with social, economic, or other attributes of society. Terrorism, particularly international terrorism, which is our main concern, is a small, artificially defined segment of political violence. Moreover, it represents the actions of very small groups. We must keep that in mind when looking for root causes.

Looking back, it seems now that the analysts of terrorism not only defined the issue, but also may have given terrorism greater coherence than the terrorists did themselves. Carlos Marighella, the leader of an urban guerrilla group in Brazil, wrote the *Mini-Manual of the Urban Guerrilla*, and a few other early veterans offered advice, but the first generation of terrorist practitioners seldom viewed their own employment of terrorist tactics as a distinct mode of armed conflict or thought of it in terms of a coherent strategy.² It was the analysts who put terrorist tactics into a broader context and, in so doing, contributed to a theory of terrorism.

How Terrorism Has Changed

Terrorism has changed dramatically since the events of the late 1960s. There appear to be fewer conflicts and fewer terrorist organizations today. Traditional political ideology, the engine of conflict in the 1970s and 1980s, has declined as a motivating force, while the force of ideologies drawing upon religion has increased.

The most dramatic change has been the escalation of terrorism. More than 30 years ago, I wrote that “terrorists want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead.” The phrase became an aphorism. It meant that terrorist concerns about self-image, group cohesion, not alienating perceived constituents, or provoking public backlash imposed constraints on their actions.

These self-imposed constraints were not universal or immutable, and by the mid-1980s, it was clear that they were eroding. As I noted

in a paper I delivered at a conference in 1985, “the number of incidents with fatalities and multiple fatalities has increased.” More alarming was “the growing number of incidents of large-scale, indiscriminate violence.” Terrorists were detonating huge car bombs on city streets and planting bombs aboard trains and airliners, in airline terminals, at railroad stations, and in hotel lobbies, “all calculated to kill in quantity.”³

There are several explanations for the escalation. Terrorists themselves had become increasingly brutalized and more proficient. As terrorism became more commonplace, maintaining public attention and coercive power required escalation. Internal dynamics were at work, too. Fainthearted terrorists were being shoved aside by more-ruthless elements, while political fanatics were giving way to religious fanatics who claimed God’s mandate, allowing them to ignore ordinary moral constraints. These tendencies culminated in the attacks of September 11, 2001.

Today, many (although not all) terrorists want a lot of people watching *and* a lot of people dead. The most recent terrorist attacks have had as their paramount goal the highest body count possible. We see this in recent jihadist operations around the world. Only the lack of means has prevented greater carnage.

Killing in quantity is difficult, although there is still room for escalation beyond the 9/11 benchmark. Since 9/11, about 40 people, on average, have died in each major jihadist terrorist attack. Return on investment per bomb runs between 12 and 20 fatalities. Achieving more fatalities requires multiple coordinated attacks—ten bombs in Madrid, four in London, three in Amman. Chemical and biological agents have already been used, although with limited results. Not surprisingly, the most significant attacks have been carried out by cult members or religious fanatics.

Yet our worst fears about what terrorists might do have not been realized. Chemical and biological terrorism have been of concern for decades. According to a survey taken more than 20 years ago, most terrorism experts had thought that terrorists would attack with chemical weapons by the end of the century, a forecast confirmed in 1995 with the release of nerve gas on Tokyo’s subways, but with less

lethal consequences than we had imagined. The experts were less persuaded in 1985 that by the end of the century we would see terrorists waging biological warfare.⁴ Then 2001 brought the anthrax letters, although the attack was small in scale. Analysts have long worried about cities being held hostage by terrorists armed with weapons of mass destruction, but while letters have been received from lunatics claiming to have nuclear weapons, such an event has not happened yet.

The possibility of nuclear black markets, terrorists with nuclear weapons, and the dispersal of radioactive material was the stuff of novels in the 1960s, and of growing official concern certainly by the early 1970s.⁵ Official anxiety was heightened by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the exposure of its vast nuclear arsenal to corruption and organized crime. Indeed, nuclear terrorism remains a major concern. Graham Allison, in his 2004 book *Nuclear Terrorism: The Ultimate Preventable Catastrophe*, concluded that “a nuclear terrorist attack on America in the decade ahead is more likely than not.”⁶

Although precision-guided surface-to-air missiles are widely available on the black market and are believed to have been in some terrorists’ arsenals for years, there is only one example of such missiles being used against commercial aircraft outside of a conflict zone; that was in Kenya in 2002, when al Qaeda operatives fired two missiles at a commercial plane. Terrorists have not attempted to seize or sabotage operating nuclear reactors. Terrorists have not attacked agriculture.

Nor has terrorism escalated horizontally. There are no more terrorist organizations in the field today than there were 10 or 20 years ago. And there is even less organization today than there was before, as those employing terrorist tactics have moved away from formal military structures.

As we have learned, counting the total number of terrorist incidents can be tricky. Much depends on the definition of a terrorist incident. For many years, RAND’s own database at least provided consistency. It showed a dramatic increase in the total number of incidents in the 1970s and early 1980s, reaching a high point in the latter half of the decade, then tailing off in the 1990s. The annual

totals were in the hundreds. Since 9/11, the U.S. government's annual reports first showed a surprising decline in the number of incidents, which turned out to be false, and then showed dramatic increases into the thousands owing to changes in accounting methods and the insurgency in Iraq. Merely counting terrorist incidents does not capture the qualitative change in terrorism toward increasingly indiscriminate violence.

The incidence of international terrorist attacks with 25 or more fatalities, however, shows a different trajectory. There were 11 such attacks in the 1970s, jumping to 19 in the 1980s, then dropping back to 12 in the 1990s, but the total has gone back up to 19 between 2000 and the first part of 2006.

Nevertheless, terrorists have not fulfilled our (or their) darkest fantasies. Despite the appearance of mass-destruction scenarios in books, broadcasts, and screenplays for 30 years, terrorists have not tried to implement most of those scenarios. Why? It could be that such operations are far more difficult to execute than we imagine, or that they are harder to control, or that they are not as attractive to terrorists as we think they would be. We still don't adequately understand the terrorist mindset.

What did change beyond question on 9/11 were our perceptions. The 9/11 attacks redefined plausibility. Scenarios previously dismissed as far-fetched became operative presumptions. In the 1970s, analysts extrapolating from terrorist seizures of hostages thought that large-scale threats would be used to hold cities hostage in order to make political demands. Today, the scenarios are extrapolations of 9/11: devastating attacks carried out without warning and intended to kill rather than to coerce.

Another significant development in terrorism involves communications. I confess to being the author of another aphorism: "Terrorism is aimed at the people watching—terrorism is theater." By choreographing dramatic acts of violence, terrorists attract attention to themselves and their causes. But while authorities have complained about the role of the media in broadcasting terror, the terrorists have also complained about media coverage.

The media focus on the human drama—the victims, the pathos, the very elements that terrorists exploit to get attention. But the media seldom convey the terrorists' messages. Part of the problem is that terrorists have historically tended to be poor communicators, which may be one reason for their resorting to dramatic violence to attract an audience. When kidnapping, murder, and masked press conferences were insufficient to persuade people to read their manifestos, terrorists sometimes demanded publication or broadcasts as part of their price for returning or releasing hostages.

More recently, terrorists have improved their communications skills and have exploited new technology—video cameras and especially the Internet—to reach their audience directly. Their production values have gotten better. Their marketing is more sophisticated. One terrorist organization has even started its own television network.

The Internet is especially important, since it allows rapid, unmediated access to a global audience. Many terrorist organizations now have their own web sites. Osama bin Laden began communicating regularly to followers via taped video recordings. Well-done terrorist videos and DVDs are circulated on the Internet, and today's jihadists are even using videogames for recruiting. Online magazines provide instruction in bomb-making and terrorist tactics. Actual terrorist attacks, pleas by those held hostage, and gruesome beheadings are fed directly into the Internet, engaging the audience in a virtual jihad.

Counterterrorism also has evolved over the past 30 years, from combating terrorism, a narrowly defined problem, to the multi-dimensional "global war on terror." Not surprisingly, the 9/11 attacks attracted the attention of a new generation of scholars. Some of the many books that have filled the terrorism bookshelf since 9/11 are diatribes of shrill polemics and fear-mongering, and some are journalistic quickies to exploit the market, but there has also been a lot of excellent analysis.

Amid the noise, we need to remember that history does not march single file. There is no single historical thread, no inexorable sequence of events from the hijackings of the early 1970s to the 1980 Iran hostage crisis to the 1983 bombing of American Marines in

Beirut to the 1988 sabotage of Pan Am 103 to al Qaeda's actions in the 1990s to 9/11. Assertions that prior U.S. policy failures led to 9/11 flatten history and bend the facts.

This is especially true in examining the use of military power. Since the 1970s, I have argued that the employment of military force has to be an option to rescue hostages held by terrorists or to respond to terrorist campaigns and attacks. And almost 30 years ago, I asserted that it should be a well-understood principle of American policy that in order to prevent the acquisition or use of weapons of mass destruction by terrorists, the United States will do whatever it deems necessary, including using unilateral, preemptive, military force. (At that time, I had in mind attacking terrorists in countries whose governments were unable or unwilling to take action themselves and where time did not permit other solutions.)

However, I also recognized the difference between policy options and actual decisions. Circumstances might not permit the use of military force or might indicate that it was not the wisest course of action. At some times, military force has been employed; at other times, it has been considered but rejected; and at still others, it has been used ineffectually. Nonetheless, although the use of military force in specific circumstances short of war gradually became an accepted component of America's counterterrorist arsenal, going to war over terrorism remained as unimaginable prior to 9/11 as not using military force was unimaginable after 9/11.

In my view, if the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was not going to cooperate quickly by shutting down al Qaeda and bringing its leaders to justice, the regime had to be removed, and al Qaeda's training camps in Afghanistan had to be dispersed. These actions should be, I argued in September 2001, only the first salvos in an unrelenting campaign to destroy al Qaeda's terrorist enterprise. I saw these actions as being concurrent with the ongoing efforts to combat terrorism worldwide. They would inevitably draw the United States into some contests beyond its immediate areas of interest, but I did not envision a U.S.-led global war to eliminate all terrorist groups. I believed that each case would require a different mix of policy instruments.

Basic Beliefs

This book began as a project to compile the briefings, memoranda, and essays that I have written over the past six years into a single coherent volume. Reviewing my own work, I find that certain basic themes recur:

The enemies we face have changed fundamentally. There is no single military power that can match that of the United States, but the diverse adversaries of today pose an array of security challenges. Each one is unique, requiring great adaptability on our part. Today's foes do not threaten the global devastation that would have resulted from an all-out nuclear exchange—the paramount concern during the Cold War—but their capabilities could nonetheless produce disastrous levels of death and destruction. Dissuading or preventing terrorists from acquiring and using weapons of mass destruction will require new ways of thinking about deterrence, preemption, and retaliation.

Patterns of armed conflict have also changed. While precision-guided weapons have greatly reduced collateral casualties and damage, guerrilla wars and terrorist campaigns have paradoxically moved in the opposite direction, becoming more destructive, less discriminate, focusing the violence on civilian populations rather than military targets. In conflicts driven by ethnic or tribal antagonisms or by religious fanaticism rather than secular political goals, noncombatants seldom find any of the protections theoretically accorded to them. Massacres, ethnic cleansing, kidnapping, amputation and rape as strategic weapons, assaults on religious centers, the systematic murder of teachers and health workers, the destruction of crops, and starvation are frequent features of today's conflicts. To finance themselves, guerrilla groups and terrorist organizations have increasingly turned to criminal activities, providing profit motives for perpetual conflict. Where conflict has degenerated into warfare among competing warlords, rival armies avoid debilitating battles with each other while terrorizing civilian populations. The border between conflict and crime is blurring.

Unrelenting pressure on the al Qaeda organization and its terrorist allies has forced the jihadists to operate at a lower, but still lethal, level. However, the United States has neglected the political war. A wanted-poster approach condemns us to a strategy of stepping on cockroaches one at a time. What we must also do is shatter the appeal of the jihadist ideology. Even as we keep al Qaeda's leaders on the run, pursue and kill or capture terrorist operatives, and foil terrorist plots, we must, at the same time, defeat their missionary enterprise. This means pursuing a campaign against jihadist recruitment, encouraging defections, turning around those in captivity.

Although President George W. Bush warns Americans that "the war on terrorism will take a while," it is not clear that either those in the administration or average citizens at home fully comprehend what that means—or the great challenge it presents, especially to an impatient society. We need to stop looking for "high noons" in a hundred-years war. One of the most common complaints from allied intelligence services is that the United States is determined to make visible scores in the short term, even at the expense of long-term intelligence gains. We are hampered in Iraq by the consequences of continuing pressure in the military to go for knockout blows, repeated and premature assertions that the enemy is on the ropes, and growing political pressure for a timetable to pull out.

Much of our impatience derives from an inability to foresee the end. What does "victory" mean? Campaigns against terrorists seldom end with victory in any traditional sense of that term. Terrorist groups are rarely destroyed. Instead, as circumstances change, they eventually become irrelevant.

Americans must be ferociously pragmatic for the long term. As a matter of principle, the United States opposes terrorism in all forms. However, that does not mean we should immediately attempt to take down every identified terrorist organization.

The invasion of Iraq was a dangerous distraction. Even if Saddam Hussein had been hiding weapons of mass destruction, he was boxed in once the weapons inspectors had returned, which had been accomplished only as a consequence of the threat of invasion. To invade was to risk great costs in return for marginal gains, costs that

inevitably would fall mostly on Americans. But we cannot erase the war in Iraq, and withdrawal poses new dangers. We are there now, and whatever we do from now on should be calibrated to cause no further harm to us or the Iraqis.

In the longer struggle against the jihadists and future terrorist foes, we will ultimately prevail. We will contain them, reduce their appeal, outlast them. This is not to say that there won't be further costly terrorist attacks against Americans abroad or on U.S. soil. The greater danger is the reaction the attacks may provoke. Terror, not terrorists, is the principal threat.

America's courage is its ultimate source of security. We cannot expect a risk-free society. While we must try to prevent terrorist attacks because of the impact they have on society as a whole, we should be realistic about risk: The danger to individual Americans is not great. We have in our history faced worse.

Homeland security begins at home. To empower the nation against fear, every citizen should have a role; all Americans should know what they can do to take care of themselves, their families, their neighbors, their community.

Whatever we do, American values must be preserved. The right response to terrorism is not unlimited surveillance and unchecked powers of arrest. There must be rules about what we can do with those who are in our custody. Torture can never be legal. American values are not luxuries. They are strategic resources that will sustain us through a long war.

Straight Talk

The reader will find strong personal opinions on these pages. There is much concerning the conduct of the war on terror⁷ that I agree with: the muscular initial response to 9/11, the removal of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, the relentless pursuit of al Qaeda's leaders and planners, the increasingly sophisticated approach to homeland security, and, although I have deep reservations about the invasion of

Iraq, President Bush's determination to avoid an arbitrary timetable for withdrawal.

The list of things with which I do not agree is longer. As explained in this book, these aspects of the war on terror have, if anything, undermined our campaign: the needless bravado, the arrogant attitude toward essential allies, the exploitation of fear, the exaggerated claims of progress, the persistence of a wanted-poster approach while the broader ideological struggle is ignored, the rush to invade Iraq, the failure to deploy sufficient troops there despite the advice of senior military leaders and the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, the cavalier dismissal of treaties governing the conduct of war, the mistreatment of prisoners, the unimaginable public defense of torture, the use of homeland security funding for political pork barrel spending, and the failure to educate and involve citizens.

This book is not intended to serve any political agenda. Its sole objective is to reckon how America can defeat its terrorist foes while preserving its own liberty. Throughout the Cold War, Americans maintained a rough consensus on defense matters, despite substantive disagreements. Unity did not require the suspension of honest differences or of civilized political debate. But today's fierce partisanship has reduced national politics to a gang war. The constant maneuvering for narrow political advantage, the rejection of criticism as disloyalty, the pursuit by interest groups of their own exclusive agendas, and the radio, television, newspaper, and Internet debates that thrive on provocation and partisan zeal provide a poor platform for the difficult and sustained effort that America faces. All of these trends imperil the sense of community required to withstand the struggle ahead. We don't need unanimity. We do need unity. Democracy is our strength. Partisanship is our weakness.

The book is not without uncertainties and even some apparent contradictions. Ideology is easy. Reality is messy. Well into the fifth year of the campaign against al Qaeda and the jihadist enterprise, and in the fourth year of fighting in Iraq, the future trajectories of these contests simply are not yet clear. There may be long lulls that tempt us into dangerous complacency interspersed with spectacular terrorist attacks that cause us to question any claims of progress. It is our foe's

doctrine to attack when we are inattentive. As in all long wars, we can expect surprises.

Organization of the Book

Chapter Two provides a sober assessment of the current situation. It concludes that while the United States has made progress in degrading the jihadists' operational capabilities, it has failed to dent their determination or halt their recruiting. Meanwhile, a tenacious armed resistance continues in Iraq. Nothing indicates that it will end soon. Insurgents cannot defeat U.S. forces in open battle, but we cannot stop the violence. The insurgents' strategy is to make our situation untenable, to drain our resolve. Opinions in America differ sharply, with some claiming that military pressure and political progress will eventually reduce the Iraqi insurgency to manageable brigandage and others arguing that the continued U.S. presence further fuels the fighting.

Dismissing terrorists as crazy fanatics and consigning them to the realm of evil have discouraged a deeper understanding of our foes and have restricted discussions of counterterrorist strategy. But understanding how they view the world, warfighting, and operations opens up new ways of thinking about counterterrorist strategy. Chapter Three explores the terrorist camp—the thinking of terrorist leaders, the appeal of their ideology, their indoctrination and recruiting methods, and their operational code. The chapter concludes with a hypothetical briefing that might be given to Osama bin Laden.

Chapter Four offers a new set of strategic principles to guide our conduct. It argues that the recasting of counterterrorism as “war” immediately following 9/11 was a good idea but that the “global war on terror” conflated too many threats and lumped together too many missions. The focus should be on the destruction of the jihadist enterprise, where the United States has made progress but risks losing support and momentum as a consequence of growing complacency and the controversial war in Iraq. American efforts understandably have focused almost exclusively on thwarting operations and captur-

ing terrorists—the visible tip of the iceberg. We now have to expand that strategy to impede recruiting and encourage rehabilitation. Meanwhile, there is no easy solution to Iraq. Staying the course until victory is achieved is not a strategy, but neither is a timetable for withdrawal, and withdrawal itself is dangerous, especially if it leaves behind a failed state in the heart of the Middle East. Continuing American involvement in Iraq while we figure out how to do it better may be our best approach. Whatever the outcome in Iraq, there is no near-term prospect that the fight against the jihadists will end there.

Chapter Five addresses how we can strengthen ourselves. Homeland security should move beyond gates and guards and become the impetus for rebuilding America's decaying infrastructure. We need to adopt a realistic approach to acceptable risk and to get a lot smarter about security. Instead of stoking fear, we need to build upon American traditions of determination and self-reliance and begin firing up citizen participation in preparedness and response.

Above all, we need to preserve our commitment to American values. Counterterrorism is not simply technique. It confronts us with dilemmas that often have a moral dimension. Whatever we do must be consistent with our fundamental values. This is no mere matter of morality, it is a strategic calculation, and here we have at times miscalculated.