

Cutting the Fuse

*The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism
and How to Stop It*

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Why Focus on *Suicide* Terrorism

The right kind of public debate on terrorism is finally beginning. For years after 9/11, the national discussion about how to deal with terrorism seemed to be frozen with little true debate about the root causes of the threat we face. First, we lived through the fear and anger in the immediate aftermath of that terrible day. Next, we lived through a period of hastily constructed responses, which led not only to the necessary war in Afghanistan to eliminate Al Qaeda's sanctuary there, but also the poorly based threat assessments that led up to the invasion of Iraq. After that came years of dealing with the repercussions of these decisions made in anger, fear, and haste, including the rise of the largest anti-American suicide terrorist campaigns in history in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan; the losses of over 100,000 Iraqi civilians who died in the civil war resulting from the U.S. invasion; and the emergence of a new Al Qaeda sanctuary in the tribal regions of Pakistan from which numerous plots have been hatched to kill Americans and their allies.¹

Throughout these years, many have presumed that the root cause of the terrorist threat confronting us is Islamic fundamentalism—a religiously motivated hatred of American and Western values among a tiny fringe of Muslims scattered across the globe, and not related to any foreign or military policies by the United States or its allies. The idea that terrorists were willing to kill themselves to achieve religious martyrdom independently of any political goal seemed to explain why Islamic fundamentalists would

1. Major contributors to this book were Jacob Homan and the contributors listed individually by chapter. Research assistants for this book were Mohammand Abdeljalil, Almad Baasiri, Vanessa Bernick, Julia Clemons, Osama Eledam, Alicia May, Dina Rashed, Dahlia Rizk, Dana Rovang, Nicolaj Zemesaraja, and Brenda Kay Zylstra and the assistants listed individually by chapter.

commit suicide attacks, a tactic that appeared to reinforce just how much “they hate us.”

This presumption fueled the belief that future 9/11s can be avoided only by wholesale transformation of Muslim societies, which was a core reason for the invasion of Iraq.² Indeed, for those advocating transformation, Iraq appeared to be the perfect place to start, since its leader Saddam Hussein had already spent decades to diminish Islamic fundamentalism in the country, and so the United States could conquer Iraq without fear of much terrorism in response, establish a base of operations, and then move on to transform other Middle Eastern countries.³ If the presumption was right—if religion independent of American and Western foreign policy was driving the threat—then the use of heavy military power to bring democratic institutions to Muslim countries should have reduced the frequency of anti-American inspired terrorist attacks, especially suicide terrorism, by eliminating the authoritarian regimes that were thought to be the breeding grounds for Islamic radicalism

Events, however, have not turned out as the presumption would have expected. Far from declining, anti-American-inspired terrorism—particularly suicide terrorism—is more frequent today than before 9/11 and even before the invasion of Iraq. In the 24-year period from 1980 to 2003, there were just under 350 suicide terrorist attacks around the world—of which fewer than 15% could reasonably be considered directed against Americans. By contrast, in the six years from 2004 to 2009, the world has witnessed 1,833 suicide attacks—of which 92% are anti-American in origin. America has made progress in bringing Western institutions to Iraq, but democracy has not proved to be a panacea for reducing terrorism directed toward Americans and American allies. As this book shows, the Madrid and London terrorist bombings of 2004 and 2005, respectively, and numerous plots against Americans were specifically inspired by the invasion of Iraq.

2. Not just among the public, but within the Bush administration as well. Long before President George W. Bush received high-level classified briefings on Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction in December 2002, he was briefed in the days after the September 11 attacks about Bernard Lewis’s famous explanation for why Islamic fundamentalism is the root of Muslim rage leading to anti-Western terrorism, and in the subsequent weeks Lewis himself advocated for “a military take-over of Iraq to avert still-worse terrorism” by “seeding democracy in the Mideast” to White House officials, including Condoleezza Rice and Vice President Richard Cheney. Peter Waldman, “A Historian’s Take on Islam Steers U.S. in Terrorism Fight,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 3, 2004.

3. David Frum and Richard Perle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror* (New York: Random House, 2003).

The more we've gone over there, the more they've wanted to come over here—and the absence of another 9/11 is due more to extensive American domestic security measures, immigration controls, intelligence, and pure luck than to lack of intent or planning by our enemies.

As the facts have not fit our presumptions, public discussion on the root causes of terrorism has grown in recent years. During the 2008 presidential campaign, candidates, columnists, and commentators in the United States, Europe, and around the world critically examined the U.S. strategy in the “war on terror,” and even whether the U.S. actions have inadvertently contributed to more terrorism. In recent years, news media have stopped running the endless stories about “why do only Muslims do it?” and more wide-ranging and informative debate on “who becomes a suicide terrorist” is occurring.

Why Suicide Terrorism Is Important

In the 1990s, any American watching the evening news or CNN, and even those closely following daily events in print and online, could be excused for not seeing an evolving terrorist threat to the United States.

To be sure, many violent problems consumed our attention. Crime in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and other major cities; ethnic cleaning in Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo, and other civil wars; and conventional military conflicts involving Iraq versus Kuwait and China versus Taiwan all attracted remarkable coverage in the national and international media and called for dedicated plans of action by leading policy makers in the United States, Europe, Asia, and other countries around the world.

What did not seem to matter much was terrorism. The main concern—some would say obsession—of publics and leaders in many major countries for years now was hardly a blip on our radar in the 1990s.

What changed? Today, many people might instinctively answer “9/11,” meaning a terrorist attack in the heart of the United States against a leading symbol of America's freedom and prosperity—the World Trade Center. This instinctive answer is obviously true, as far as it goes. But it also masks an important, deeper reality about the new threat facing the United States after September 11, 2001.

The new threat was not “terrorism”—at least not the old-fashioned kind that has been with the world for centuries. Ordinary terrorism occurred in the United States for years before 9/11. Indeed, the first terrorist attack on

the World Trade Center occurred on February 26, 1993, when Islamic terrorists detonated a car bomb in the parking garage of Tower One, seeking to knock it down. Although the tower did not fall that day, six people were killed—something few people now remember and something that did not turn the American government, our military, and much of the country upside down to prevent from happening again. No, the new threat was not simply “terrorism.”

What made 9/11 different was the willingness of 19 individuals to give their lives to kill a large number of Americans. No doubt, the attack was evil—the 3,000 innocent people who died that day did nothing to deserve their horrible fate. No doubt, the attackers were terrorists, but what made 9/11 very different from the terrorism Americans had experienced in the 1990s was the element of *suicide* by the attackers. The element of suicide is what made it possible for 19 hijackers to kill thousands of people. Even though these 19 were surely dead, the thought of more *suicide terrorist attacks* propelled anxiety and fear to levels few Americans had experienced in their lifetimes.

More consequences followed. The element of suicide is what instantly persuaded millions of Americans that future attacks could not be deterred by the threat of retaliation against the attackers. Indeed, the element of suicide called into question all our standard ways of responding to violence and so opened the door to all manner of “out of the box” strategic thinking—from the idea of preventive war against countries not immediately attacking us to the concept of almost unlimited surveillance of virtually any person in the United States by agencies in the executive branch of the U.S. government without observing the normal (and constitutionally mandated) rules of congressional and judicial oversight.⁴ Since suicide terrorists must be stopped before they strike, it seemed necessary to look for them almost everywhere, even if no evidence existed that “they” were “there” at all.

In the years since 9/11, these “out of the box” responses have come under increasing scrutiny. Even defenders of staying the course would hardly deny that many of the domestic and foreign policies associated with the “war on terrorism” have produced their own costs and risks—in lives, national debt, and America’s standing in the world. As painful as side effects are, however, they do not really call into question the basic logic of the

4. For a riveting account, see Jack L. Goldsmith, *The Terror Presidency: Law and Judgment inside the Bush Administration* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).

threat we face and how we should respond to it. They are a bit like a doctor telling a patient to stop smoking to avoid the risk of lung cancer and the patient asking, “won’t I gain weight?” The side effect is real, but far from clearly more worrisome than the main threat.

Suicide terrorism is like lung cancer in other ways too. Just as there are numerous forms of cancer, and some quite benign, there are a various forms of terrorism, not all of which are worth the dedicated attention of our national leaders for sustained periods of time. Lung cancer justifies inordinate resources and attention because it is the leading cause of death among all cancers (and many other diseases). So too suicide terrorism. It merits special attention, because this type of terrorism is responsible for more deaths than any other form of the phenomenon—from 1980 to 2001, over 70% of all deaths due to terrorism were the result of suicide terrorism even though this tactic amounted to only 3% of all terrorist attacks.

Lung cancer can also exist for years, hardly creating symptoms until its most virulent stage. So too suicide terrorism. Although it may sound surprising, the United States did not begin to keep statistics on suicide terrorism until the fall of 2000,⁵ even though it had been tracking ordinary terrorism around the world for decades. This omission goes a long way toward explaining why 9/11 was so hard to see coming.

If one looks at the U.S. government data on the global patterns of ordinary terrorism from 1980 to 2001, there is an unmistakable decline in the threat. Indeed, the peak is 1988 when some 666 terrorist attacks occurred globally, and this number declined more or less steadily over the next 10 plus years to 348 in 2001. At the same time, what started out as a tiny number of suicide terrorist attacks around the world was climbing at an alarming rate, from an average of only 3 suicide attacks per year in the 1980s to 10 per year in the 1990s to 50 per year from 2000 to 2003 and to 300 per year from 2004 to 2009.

These facts help explain why there was such a broad failure of imagination before 9/11—not only among the public, not only among national policy makers, but even by “terrorism experts” at the time. Since all terrorism was dropping like a rock and we were not tracking suicide terrorism in anything like a comprehensive way, it was hard to see that the threat was growing.

5. This was confirmed by correspondence between Argonne National Laboratories and the data manager for the U.S. government’s database on terrorism located at the Naval Post-Graduate School in Monterey California, in fall 2003.

To prevent future 9/11s, it is crucial to focus our attention on preventing anti-American suicide terrorism. True, other forms of terrorism also matter. Conventional truck bomb attacks against bridges, antiaircraft missile shots at civilian airliners, the proliferation of chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons that leads to their use by terrorists—every one of these other terrorist threats is nontrivial. Every one was with us in the 1990s. But, the crucial point is that every one is greatly magnified by the willingness of the terrorists to kill themselves in order to carry the attacks out. Although suicide terrorism is not the only kind of terrorism, it is the most virulent form of the phenomenon and makes every other form of terrorism far more deadly than before.

Consider the following thought experiment. Imagine for the moment that you are Osama bin Laden and you have finally achieved your heart's desire—possession of a working nuclear warhead. Its explosive power is about the size of the atomic bomb that destroyed most of Nagasaki in World War II, the likes of which could devastate Manhattan, Boston, or Los Angeles, surely killing tens of thousands, perhaps over a hundred thousand, of Americans if the bomb actually goes off in one of these cities. You, bin Laden, have hated America for years. You cannot wait to fulfill your dream of inflicting a sucking chest wound on the “far enemy.” You want the world to know your power.

But you have a problem. What if you send this one nuclear warhead in a container on a merchant ship, unescorted by anyone, and something goes wrong? What if the port authorities—now so widely criticized in the media—come across the bomb either by accident or through unreported heightened security measures? What if the bomb gets through to the port, but then fails to explode either because the atomic triggers were faulty in the first place or became so during the 1,000-mile-plus voyage? What if tens of other problems occur that you cannot even now foresee? Will former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's famous “unknown unknowns” make you look like a fool in front of the world and waste this precious asset?

Getting nuclear weapons for terrorists is hard, much harder than fear-mongers in the Western media like to suggest.⁶ You know this and know that you cannot count on getting more for years or may be ever. What do you, bin Laden, do?

6. John E. Mueller, *Atomic Obsession: Nuclear Alarmism from Hiroshima to Al Qaeda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

The answer should now be rushing to your mind. You look for individuals willing to escort the nuclear bomb all the way to its target, to protect the weapon from discovery and seizure along the way, to execute a suicide attack if the bomb works as advertised, and to bring the bomb back for repair if it does not. Just as finding 19 people willing to kill themselves was the key to killing thousands of Americans on 9/11, so too would relying on suicide attackers make all the difference in the likely success of killing 10 or more times as many Americans in a nuclear 9/11. Suicide attack is not the only way to strike the United States or any other country with a nuclear weapon. It is, however, the most reliable way to employ the one, or at most handful, of nuclear weapons likely to come your way.

This thought experiment could be multiplied many times over for truck bombs, chemical and biological attacks, and virtually any kind of terrorist strike plan that truly sought to kill large numbers of people. In all of these, adding the element of suicide to the attack drastically increases the odds of success. And this is the point of a suicide terrorist attack. From the perspective of the terrorist organization, the purpose of a suicide terrorist attack is not for the attacker to die—this is the easy part, once an attacker is willing to participate in such a mission at all. Rather, the purpose is to kill large numbers of people, which is true whether the suicide terrorist attack involves conventional explosives or weapons of mass destruction. Suicide terrorists are the ultimate smart bomb.

What We Know about Suicide Terrorism

Suicide terrorists are superpredators. They murder vast numbers of innocent people in each attack. They are the subject of seemingly endless “three-minute” discussions on Fox, CNN, and MSNBC. Yet, many people still wonder about the motives and dynamics that lead man after man, and increasingly woman after woman, to strap on bombs, load up their cars with explosives, or ram planes into buildings and kill themselves on missions to kill others.

To answer the question, we need to look at more than pictures of mangled bodies, blown out busses, and collapsed buildings. To know why suicide terrorist campaigns occur in some places and not others, why they start at some times and not others, and why they end, we need to look at more than the evil of suicide terrorism. It is all well and good to condemn suicide terrorists as murderers or “homicide terrorists.” But when moral

posturing comes to replace reasoned assessment of data and dispassionate consideration of the causes of a phenomenon, we may end up with a visceral response rather than an effective plan of action to protect those we care about. In the 1940s and 1950s, lung cancer was spreading, killing more and more people and causing more and more heartbreak, seeming more and more out of control each year. What helped was not simply more aggressive treatments after the fact, but new studies that explained the root causes of the phenomenon so that that lung cancer could be stopped before it started. In the decades since, this research probably did more than any treatment to save lives.⁷

We should learn from our experience with lung cancer. If collection of comprehensive data, reasoned assessment of the facts, and debate about how information we have fits or does not fit alternative explanations can help reduce suicide terrorism even modestly, this is all worth the effort.

Recently, academic research on the causes of terrorism has made significant progress, particularly on suicide terrorism. Although our understanding of the phenomenon is still growing, knowledge about the causes, conduct, and consequences of suicide terrorism has substantially improved since 9/11, much of which is embodied in the chapters in this volume. Important methodological advances and new data have helped to make this progress possible, as has the influx of new scholars.⁸ In particular, we now have the first complete data set of all suicide terrorist attacks around the world from 1980 to 2009, which greatly improves our ability to assess possible causes of the phenomenon. As with lung cancer, we now know more clearly who is struck and who is not, and this significantly helps us understand why.

A central result has been the advent of a new theory to explain the phenomenon of suicide terrorism. Prior to 9/11, the expert debate on the causes of suicide terrorism was divided largely between two explanations, religious fanaticism and mental illness.⁹ In the years after 9/11, new research on who becomes a suicide terrorist showed that virtually none could be diagnosed as mentally ill, while many were religious and, most striking, nearly all emerged from communities resisting foreign military occupation. *Dying*

7. Evelyn N. Powers and Jasmina B. Cabbot, *Smoking and Lung Cancer* (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2008).

8. For example, see the new research on terrorism in the special issue of *Security Studies*, December 2009.

9. For a good assortment of the 1990s literature, see Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998).

to Win, published in 2005, was prominent in advancing this new explanation for the origins of suicide terrorism. From 1980 to 2003, there were 345 completed suicide terrorist attacks by 524 suicide terrorists who actually killed themselves on a mission to kill others, half of whom are secular. The world leader was the Tamil Tigers (a secular, Hindu group) who carried out more attacks than Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) during this period. Further, at least a third of the suicide attacks in predominantly Muslim countries were carried out by secular terrorist groups, such as the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey. Instead of religion, what over 95% of all suicide terrorist attacks before 2004 had in common was a strategic goal: to compel a democratic state to withdraw combat forces that are threatening territory that the terrorists' prize. From Lebanon to Sri Lanka to the West Bank to Chechnya, the central goal of every suicide terrorist campaign has been to resist military occupation by a democracy.¹⁰

What Is New in *Cutting the Fuse*

The years since 2004 have witnessed a substantial growth in the number of suicide terrorist attacks, nearly 500% more than all the years from 1980 to 2003 combined. This leads to three questions:

1. Do the global patterns of suicide terrorism since 2004 validate or invalidate the hypothesis that foreign military occupation, or the imminent threat of it, is the root cause of suicide terrorism?
1. Do the global patterns of suicide terrorism since 2004 indicate new factors that add to the causal logic of existing theories, telling us more about when and where suicide terrorism will occur?
2. Do the global patterns of suicide terrorism since 2004 suggest new solutions or major improvements to existing solutions to the threat we face?

The purpose of this book is to answer these questions, analyzing all suicide terrorist attacks around the world from 1980 to 2009, nearly 2,200 attacks in all. Each suicide terrorist attack is defined in the classic sense of an individual killing himself or herself on a mission to kill others and has been verified by two or more independent sources by a research team flu-

10. Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005).

ent in the key native languages associated with suicide terrorism (Arabic, Hebrew, Tamil, Russian, Urdu, etc.), and members of the team have also contributed to the analysis of individual suicide terrorist campaigns in this book.

In brief, the new research finds the following.

1) Strong confirmation for the hypothesis that military occupation is the main factor driving suicide terrorism. The stationing of foreign combat forces (ground and tactical air force units) on territory that terrorists prize accounts for 87% of the over 1,800 suicide terrorist attacks around the world since 2004. The occupation of Pakistan's western tribal regions by local combat forces allied to American military forces stationed across the border in Afghanistan accounts for another 12%. Further, the timing of the deployment of combat forces threatening territory the terrorists prize accounts for the onset of all eight major suicide terrorist campaigns¹¹ between 1980 and 2009, which together comprise 96% of the 2,188 attacks during that period. Simply put, military occupation accounts for nearly all suicide terrorism around the world since 1980. For this finding to be wrong, our research team would have had to miss hundreds of suicide attacks during this period, which is unlikely as readers can judge for themselves by reviewing the database of suicide attacks available online.¹²

Although each of the major suicide terrorist campaigns is important, perhaps the most urgent finding within specific campaigns concerns the recent abrupt spike of suicide terrorism in Afghanistan, where starting in early 2006 the number of suicide attacks suddenly rose from a handful to over 100 per year. The key reason was United States and NATO military deployments, which began to extend to the Pashtun southern and eastern regions of the country beginning in late 2005. In 2006, the United States pressured Pakistan to deploy large military forces in the Pashtun areas of western Pakistan, which also led to a large increase of suicide attacks in the country. In effect, the more the United States and its military allies have militarily occupied the Pashtun homeland, the more this has inspired suicide terrorism to end the occupation.

11. To be clear, a suicide terrorist campaign occurs when one or more suicide attacks are intended as part of a cluster organized by one or more groups to achieve a specific political goal. Suicide attacks that do not occur as part of campaigns are called "isolated" attacks.

12. For the specific sources for each attack, see the searchable database on suicide attacks by the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism at <http://cpost.uchicago.edu>.

2) *Strong evidence for new hypotheses about the causes of transnational suicide terrorism.* *Dying to Win* explained that nationalism—the desire to perpetuate the local political, religious, and social institutions of a community independent of foreign interference—is the taproot explanation for why individuals from a community facing foreign military occupation would undertake costly measures to defend it, including, in extremis, suicide terrorism. This causal logic is important since the overwhelming number of suicide attackers do live in the occupied country or in immediately adjacent border regions that are also under spillover threat from the occupation. However, *Dying to Win* left unanswered the causal logic of transnational suicide attackers—individuals living in countries far removed from the occupied countries—who comprise about 10% of the over 2,600 suicide attackers from 1980 to 2009 and as much as a fifth to a third of some prominent suicide terrorist campaigns (Iraq and Al Qaeda).

Cutting the Fuse provides a new causal logic for the phenomenon of transnational suicide terrorism. Although existing theories contend that it is a product of religious fanaticism or economic alienation, this volume shows that the logic of military occupation should be extended to account for transnational suicide terrorism.

Transnational suicide terrorism is a classic instance of individuals with multiple national loyalties to different stable communities of people associated with a territory, distinctive culture, and common language, one loyalty for their kindred community and another for their current country of residence, in which the loyalty for their kindred community wins out. However, these dueling loyalties do not exist in a vacuum, but are powerfully influenced by external circumstances. Specifically, the hierarchy of competing national loyalties can be strongly influenced by which community, the kindred or local, is most under threat. The hierarchy of multiple loyalties is not an a priori weighting among demographic factors such as place of birth, current residence, ethnicity, or religion, but is often constructed by circumstances in the international environment that shape individuals' perceptions of the relative importance of their loyalties, most particularly the level of threat to the different communities valued by the individuals. Hence, the foreign military occupation of kindred communities can compel individuals with multiple loyalties to adopt a hierarchy that privileges the kindred community over the local one. Perhaps most important, for transnational suicide attackers, this hierarchy of loyalties is normally established among preexisting groups of individuals who become progressively more radical as a group over time. As *Cutting the Fuse* explains, only exception-

ally rare social dynamics are likely to lead to this progressive radicalization of groups, which accounts for why transnational suicide terrorism is such a rare, Black Swan phenomenon.

3) *Important evidence for the value of a new approach to more effectively combat suicide terrorism, likely to improve the effectiveness of already well-known solutions.* As *Dying to Win* explained, the key to stopping suicide terrorism campaigns, which by their nature necessarily involve a series of attacks by different individuals over time, is to prevent the rise of a new generation of suicide terrorists. Given the close association between foreign occupation and suicide terrorism, the goal of thwarting the rise of the next wave of suicide terrorism will likely require a major shift in military strategy by those target states with a military presence in foreign areas. This strategy is “offshore” balancing, which seeks to achieve foreign policy interests in key regions of the world by relying on military alliances and offshore air, naval, and rapidly deployable ground forces rather than heavy onshore combat power. In essence, this strategy would resemble America’s military commitment to the Persian Gulf from the end of World War II in 1945 to the period before the first Iraq War up to 1990, when the United States successfully pursued its interests and obligations in the region despite local instabilities and wars without stationing tank, armor, or fighter aircraft units there—and without provoking terrorism against us or our allies. After the 1991 Iraq War, America left tens of thousands of heavy combat forces on the Arabian Peninsula as a residual force, which became the chief rallying cry for Osama bin Laden’s terrorism against the United States and its allies. Conversely, as Israel withdrew combat forces from Gaza and large parts of the West Bank and relied on defensive measures such as the “wall” in 2004 and as the United States and its allies drew down the total number of combat forces from Iraq after January 2008, suicide terrorism in both conflicts substantially declined.

However, something else happened in Iraq. Starting in late 2006, the United States began to offer local political control and economic resources directly to large Sunni tribes in Anbar Province, which gave them significant wherewithal to provide for their own security. At the same time, the United States deployed ground forces to the most vulnerable Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad, protecting them and allowing more vulnerable Sunnis to move to safe havens within the city and bordering Anbar Province, enabling the Sunni community as a whole to better secure itself in the future. This strategy of empowering a key local community to better provide

for its security independently of the United States, the central government in the country, and the terrorists led to a decline of Iraqi suicide terrorism by over a third in the next year.

Most important, the strategy of “local empowerment” works by recognizing that suicide terrorism is driven by a strategic logic that seeks to remove foreign threats to local culture. A foreign state can remove a local population’s primary reason for supporting suicide terrorist campaigns—safeguarding the local way of life—by providing the political, economic, and military wherewithal for the local community to detect and destroy terrorists, tasks that often require deep local knowledge to achieve success. Of course, the foreign occupier is often so powerful that it could still overwhelm newly empowered local groups, and so suicide terrorism may continue at a robust level so long as foreign ground forces remain in or near their community’s area. However, the strategy of local empowerment is likely to moderate suicide terrorism over several years and serve as a useful transition strategy to offshore balancing, the grand strategy likely to work best over decades.

The Perspective of This Book

In the chapters that follow, *Cutting the Fuse* seeks to contribute to the growing public debate about the root causes of the threat we face by explaining the key findings about the new patterns of suicide terrorism since Iraq and by providing readers with the conceptual and empirical tools to assess these findings on their own. Chapters 1 and 2 explain what is driving the precipitous rise of suicide terrorism over the past five years and the special logic of transnational suicide terrorism. The body of this volume systematically assesses the causes, conduct, and consequences of the largest contemporary suicide terrorist campaigns: Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Al Qaeda, Palestine, Lebanon, Chechnya, and Sri Lanka. The conclusion offers policy recommendations, particularly why a strategy of local empowerment and offshore balancing is our best approach for safeguarding America and its allies from the threat of suicide terrorism.

This book is not written from a specific worldview, ideological orientation, or Democratic or Republican program. It is not authored by individuals who have voted consistently for one party (even in the past 10 years) or are committed to any political agenda. It is based fundamentally on a consideration of the facts of the matter and on the assumption that dispas-

sionate consideration of the facts can create consensus and hope for a new future in American foreign policy.

To take a fresh look at the facts, it is helpful to keep a few basic ideas in mind:

First impressions can be faulty. After 9/11, it seemed easy to think that Islam, poverty, social alienation, or the more sinister-sounding “Islamofascism” were the root cause of our problems. Yet, these did not just suddenly emerge in recent decades and so are poor explanations for the rise of suicide terrorism during our lifetimes. The key to improving our security is to find out what has changed and how it is propelling suicide terrorism against us.

Spectacular problems can have hard to see causes. The ultimate cause of a deadly attack is not always the most obvious. Smokers often have no symptoms of the cancer growing in their bodies for decades until just before it becomes terminal. The root causes of suicide terrorism can also fester for years before producing spectacular harm.

“Patriots”—even the most well meaning—can let their emotions get the best of them. As Ronald Reagan used to say, “Going over a cliff, carrying flags, is still going over a cliff.” Americans should take pride in our country. This should be our reason for wanting to improve our security even if this means developing new courses of action, not for staying the course with policies that actually reduce it.

Understanding what to track helps clarify a complex situation. In recent years, Americans have been inundated with an array of complicated concerns associated with the “war on terrorism”—the ebb and flow of potential proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in numerous countries, the rise and leveling off of the civil war in Iraq, and the capture of old and emergence of new Al Qaeda leaders and operatives—and these various and cross-cutting issues obscure the core question of whether the United States is winning or losing ground. Focusing on the trajectory of anti-American suicide terrorism helps to cut through the fog and provides a baseline for American security.

This book, then, seeks to demystify the terrorism threat we face. It recognizes that this threat has multiple causes and that solutions are not merely about “strong” versus “weak” policies. Being tough did not stop

Gary Cooper and Paul Newman from dying from lung cancer. Aggressive policy is sometimes the right and indispensable course of action, but aggression for aggression's sake, "getting two of them for one of us," and all other manner of blind fury can make matters worse.

Great victories often depend on a clear-eyed view of the merits of the case. Whether these facts help Democrats or Republicans in their domestic contests is far less important than whether they help improve the general welfare of the United States and our allies. The key is a willingness to consider information that may run against some of our first impressions, to see if the new data changes the overall picture in fundamental ways. Since there is no more common conventional wisdom than that the "war on terrorism" is making us safer, let us first ask: Why is anti-American suicide terrorism skyrocketing?