

THE RICHARD A. CLARKE NATIONAL SCHOLARLY MONOGRAPH CONTEST, 2011

**FAILURE OF AMERICAN STRATEGIC THOUGHT AND 9/11<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> I am eternally grateful for the encouragements and feedback from my mentor Prof. Catherine Lotrionte, advisor Dr. Paul Pillar, Mr. Richard Campisi, Mr. Kyle Gaines, Bro. Geoffrey Clement, O.S. F., and everyone in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University. This paper would not have been possible without their support. I bear final responsibility for any mistakes made and all conclusions drawn.

It has been ten years since the deadliest terrorist attacks on U.S soil took place on 11 September 2001. These attacks shook the world from its core and defined a generation. Yet, it seems that this episode of world and American history is slowly coming to a conclusion. The head of al Qaeda – the terrorist organization responsible for the attacks – lies dead on the bottom of the ocean. On the American side, the terms of office of the leaders who began the fight against al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden have expired. The necessity of political discourse regarding the background of 9/11 and America’s subsequent response is slowly fainting away. Osama bin Laden, George W. Bush and 9/11 belong in the history books. Ten years after the event, we can stop, take a breath, and reflect.

Much has been written about the history of al Qaeda, its animosity towards the United States, the events leading up to 9/11 and the actual attacks. Even more has been written about the American response. Piece by piece, a narrative has been assembled, one that started with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. In recent years many of the American leaders at the time of the attacks have come out with their own interpretations of what happened, and explanations of why they reacted the way they did. Today, we have the benefit to dive into the minds of Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, CIA Director George Tennenet, Secretary Colin Powell, Counterterrorism Tsar Richard Clarke, and CIA Senior Officer Paul Pillar, among others. Each gives us a unique point of view, allowing us to stand in their shoes for a few hundred pages. These works, however, are highly political, as each aims at not only explaining how they saw the events, but to justify their actions, and ultimately to convince us that indeed they were right and the other detractors were wrong. Indeed, every major account of the events surrounding 9/11 is loaded with excuses and finger-pointing.

The best fact-based narrative compiled thus far is the *9/11 Commission Report*. The

access to materials, documents and persons that the commission had and was able to include into its final report is breathtaking.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the 9/11 Commission was an ad hoc government institution investigating government failure to prevent the deadliest attacks against American civilians ever. In the words of the two chairmen Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton, “We were setup to fail.”<sup>2</sup> The 9/11 Commission had a mandate that was extremely broad. Washington politicians thought the commission would split on partisan lines, leak classified information or be denied access to such information do its job, and alienate the 9/11 families that lobbied for its creation. The investigation had to stretch across the entire government and into the private sector. The task was approached with no infrastructure, no offices, no staff, no security clearances, and an insufficient three million dollar budget. In spite of these challenges the Commission was successful<sup>3</sup> in providing us with a great narrative. The overall conclusion of the Commission, given its recommendations which related to the reorganization of the Intelligence Community, was that the 9/11 attacks were the failure of intelligence.<sup>4</sup> Hence, if intelligence was changed, it would make the country safer. Such logic was later expanded and attributed to the failures in foreign policy of the Bush administration, including the war in Iraq.<sup>5</sup> In the words of Paul Pillar, “The official critiques have focused on problems in procedural details – the need to reorganize the intelligence bureaucracy, plug loopholes, improve interagency communications, and remove troublesome restrictions imposed by the Constitution or international law.”<sup>6</sup> Paul Pillar continues, “The efforts to make US foreign and security policy better guided, based on the notion of intelligence reform, are themselves misguided. They miss the sources of mistaken images underlying failed policies, misconceive the intelligence-policy relationship as the reverse of how it often works, produce ‘reform’ that does not improve intelligence and in some respects makes it worse, misperceives the limits to understanding the outside world, and encourages foreign

policies that are unsound because of the failure to recognize those limits.”<sup>7</sup> Peter Bergen joined in the opinion, “The commission was a bipartisan panel, and by examining the very real problems of particular government institutions it was able largely to skirt the wider policy failures of the Clinton and Bush administrations’ handling of the Al Qaeda threat, subjects that were politically too hot to handle.”<sup>8</sup> With so much critique of the official record of 9/11, then, what really happened on 9/11?

This paper argues that on 9/11 an international terrorist organization known as al Qaeda, unique to the militant Islamic movements, achieved a deadly tactical surprise but committed strategic suicide. It further argues that the lack of American strategic thinking in the post-Cold War world enabled bin Laden with ammunition for his recruiting rhetoric and allowed his followers sanctuaries from which to plot their attacks. The invasion of Afghanistan as a result of 9/11 was an almost successful attempt to correct the blunders from the 1980s and 90s, while the Iraq War constituted the over zeal and overreaction of a fearful and misguided administration.

In support of these theses, the paper seeks to establish patterns of behavior and identify exceptions. First, it explores the rise and development of Islamic jihadist movements and puts al Qaeda in that context. Next, the paper examines the reaction of the American government to the 9/11 attacks, including the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, while providing an overview of related patterns that have developed since the Carter Administration. Finally, the paper examines the future of the threat of terrorism to the United States, and presents strategic recommendations for pursuit by American diplomats in matters of foreign affairs.

The beginning of modern Islamic radicalism and jihad can be traced to Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian writer, who traveled to the United States after World War Two. He objected to the materialism, immorality and racism that he perceived dominated in the United States, and

believed that Islam offered the only whole-of life solution, an alternative to American materialism. Returning to Egypt, he joined the Muslim Brotherhood – an organization created by more conservative Muslims as part of the Awakening after the Egyptian defeat in the war of 1967 with Israel – and began plotting against the secular government of Gamal Nasser. He was arrested and put into prison, where he wrote *Milestones*, a book that called for and justified jihad against the Near Enemy.<sup>9</sup> The basis of his teachings was that the secular, socialist government of Egypt had been corrupted by Western immorality, and had to be overthrown. Qutb's philosophy immediately became a matter of great controversy and debate as it justified the murder of secular Muslims, calling them non-Muslims. Hassan Hudaybi, the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, published a critique of *Milestones* entitled *Preachers Not Judges*. It was the work that segregated Muslim youth between Qutb's radicals and Hudaybi's conservatives.<sup>10</sup> Within the Egyptian prisons, a place where many of the decedents were held, people like Ayman al-Zawahiri were radicalized to the extreme by their humiliation from the torture they experienced. They saw the West as an enabling factor of their treatment.<sup>11</sup> It was from this experience that Egyptian Islamic Jihad, led by al-Zawahiri, was born, which was the materialization of Qutb's teachings.

Meanwhile, the wealth that was generated in Saudi Arabia as a result of the oil boom fundamentally changed the way of life for Arabs, one that had been consistent for over 2000 years and had been marked by tribalism, poverty, piety and since Mohamed, by Islam.<sup>12</sup> However, the wealth was never distributed properly among the population. Lawrence Wright noted that, "Radicalism usually prospers in the gap between rising expectations and declining opportunities. This is especially true where the population is young, idle and bored..." Furthermore, martyrdom promised in Heaven all the pleasures that an individual might be denied

on Earth because of poverty – wealth greater than the world itself, women, feasts, and the salvation of one’s family.<sup>13</sup> To hold the peace, the Saudi Royal family had struck a deal with a conservative Islamic interpretation – Wahhabism – which was the only interpretation that the Saudi Royal family recognized. This interpretation of Islam is significantly more literal and fundamentalist than most others, and has often been pointed to as a founding stone to Islamic jihadist philosophy. Thus, on the Peninsula the building of mosques and schools of other sects, including Shia, was banned. Soon after the acquisition of the wealth, Saudis began exporting Wahhabism, and by the 1980s Saudi Arabia, which holds 1% of the world’s Muslim population, supported 90% of the expenses of all the faith.<sup>14</sup> In this environment, the infusion of thousands of American contractors into Saudi Arabia to build bases of operation during the Reagan Administration caused great resentment among the more radical Saudi Muslims.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait directly threatened Saudi oil supplies to the United States and constituted an intolerable threat to the national security of the United States. The subsequent infusion of half a million American “infidel” troops into the Kingdom only exacerbated the situation.<sup>16</sup>

While Islamic extremism and terrorism in Egypt and Saudi Arabia was directed by private, non-state terrorist organizations against their respective governments, the revolutionary government of Iran began using terrorism to advance its foreign policy and ultimately became the most active sponsor of terrorism, harboring senior al Qaida leaders, assisting Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and others. After the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iran was an active sponsor of terrorist activities in the recently conquered nation.<sup>17</sup> The Islamic Republic was directly implicated for the attack in Beirut on the US Marines and French Paratroopers in 1983, after which President Reagan withdrew US forces from Lebanon, giving

militant jihadist propaganda for their uncongenial tactics.<sup>18</sup> Iran's covert organizations include the Qods Force (Jerusalem Force), which is part of the Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) and Hezbollah, which was originally confined to Lebanon and Palestine, but later expanded its operations to Saudi Arabia, Brazil and Uruguay, among others.<sup>19</sup> Although it is likely it has never been unequivocally proven that Iran and its covert arm Hezbollah were responsible for the 1992 bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina, as well as for the 1994 bombing of the Jewish cultural center in the same city.<sup>20</sup> Hani el-Sayegh, a suspect detained in Canada, told investigators that the bombing of the Khobar Towers – an active US Air Force Base - in Saudi Arabia on 25 June 1996, a bombing that claimed the lives of 19 Americans, was perpetrated by Saudi Hezbollah and Iran's Qods Force.<sup>21</sup> Such activities have brought an array of international sanctions, which however, have not worked to change the behavior of Iran.

Another Muslim nation to develop the policy of sponsoring terrorism and militants in the 1980s was Pakistan. To Pakistan, everything in matters of Foreign Policy is related to India. Unable to match India's conventional army, Pakistan turned to supporting militants. Thus, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, which protects Pakistan's western border, Pakistan became deeply embedded and supportive of the resistance in the country against the Red Army.<sup>22</sup> A few years after the defeat of the Soviet Army, a new group of radical fundamentalist emerged in Afghanistan – the Taliban. For the ISI – Pakistani intelligence services – the Taliban offered the potential of great influence in Afghanistan, as Pakistan was seeking to ensure that the Pashtuns remained in power. Plus, the Taliban could provide training for young jihadists fighting in Kashmir against India.<sup>23</sup> It was a win-win situation, and each embraced the other. In this atmosphere, Osama Bin Laden, now a fugitive, came to Afghanistan. Although he was out of money after he had been expelled from Sudan, ISI considered him a resource as well. They

financed his training camps so he could train militants to fight in Kashmir.<sup>24</sup> However, a turning point occurred inside Pakistan, which changed the equation for both the militants and the Pakistani government. In 2008 a group of militants took the Red Mosque and declared themselves out of the sovereignty of the central government, which stormed the mosque. As a result, militant organizations in the FATA region turned against the government of Pakistan.<sup>25</sup> By 2009 the Taliban had become a threat to Pakistan, which launched campaigns in Swat and South Waziristan against them. Simultaneously, the US stepped up drone attacks which killed Baitullah Mehsud, the leader of the Taliban in Pakistan.<sup>26</sup>

Al Qaeda was a byproduct of all of these developments. Its leader – Osama bin Laden – and members were heavily influenced by the radical interpretations of Islam and the dislike for socialism and Arab nationalism developed in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The Qutbian theory of aggressively attacking the near enemy was of critical importance in shaping al Qaeda's objectives and tactics. Unlike Egyptian and Saudi terrorist organizations who sought the establishment of pure Islamic states within their respective countries, Osama bin Laden took Qutb's philosophy even further. He believed in attacking the U.S. directly. The Saudi argued that if the head of the snake is cut off – the United States – the corrupt regimes in the Middle East would fall as a result.<sup>27</sup>

The founding members were also veterans who had previously been funded to fight in Afghanistan against the Soviets by American, Saudi and Pakistani intelligence.<sup>28</sup> The victory over the Soviet Union in Afghanistan gave the confidence to Osama Bin Laden, Khalid Sheik Mohamed and Hambali – the key founding members of al Qaeda – they needed. It made them think of the potential positive effects for their cause when Qurans are joined by money and few good weapons.<sup>29</sup> In particular The Battle of the Lion's Den (Battle of Jaji) of 1987, in which a

small number of Arab fighters fought off a superior Soviet force, with no strategic value, boosted the moral of Arab fighters and was the foundation of their misperception that they had defeated a superpower in Afghanistan.<sup>30</sup>

Of course, the presence of Arabs made no difference in the Afghan war.<sup>31</sup> There were never more than 3000 Arabs involved in the campaign, and many of them did not even cross the border from Pakistan into Afghanistan.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, it has been estimated that the Afghan mujahedeen fighting the Soviets during the 1980s numbered up to 175 thousand.<sup>33</sup>

Bin Laden's personal animosity towards the United States developed as a result of the Saudi King accepting American forces instead of al Qaeda fighters to defend the Kingdom from Saddam Hussein's aggression in 1991. This enraged bin Laden's pre-existing dislike of the US, which stemmed from the latter's support for Israel. He also had warned that once allowed into the Kingdom, American forces will never leave the Gulf.<sup>34</sup>

Arab and Muslim hostility towards Israel stems from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. American support for Israel has fueled and inspired the militants, starting with the Reagan Administration. Responding to increased Soviet involvement in the Middle East, Reagan initiated a close military-to-military cooperation with Israel; it was operationalized in 1983 with the creation of a joint US-Israeli planning group: The Joint Politico-Military Group (JPMG).<sup>35</sup> Between the US-Israeli partnership and buildup in Saudi Arabia, the US gained an unprecedented foothold in the Middle East. Both of these occurrences gave radicals propaganda tools for recruiting to their Anti-American objectives.<sup>36</sup>

Saddam's invasion of Kuwait threatened the Saudi oil fields, on which much of America's economy relied. Any seizure of those oilfields by the Iraqi dictator would have brought about his control over US oil imports. This was an intolerable threat to the national

security of the United States, and a result, the first Bush administration negotiated the rapid deployment of American troops into Saudi Arabia, while also assembling an impressive international coalition against Saddam Hussein.<sup>37</sup>

By the time the First Gulf War ended in 1991, the United States had emerged victorious from the Cold War, achieved an impressive tactical and operational victory over Iraq, and created an enemy who would not hesitate to die only to harm Americans. Osama bin Laden, now a veteran of the Afghan war, self-confident, and a man without anything else to do, had organized the few Arab fighters he had under his command into the new movement of al Qaida. However, the changes in Eastern Europe and the raging conflict initiated by Saddam Hussein in the Gulf, occupied the entire attention of the world. Richard Clarke commented, “Little noticed by most Americans, including its government, a new international movement began growing during the last two decades. It does not just seek terror for its own sake; that international movement’s goal is the creation of a network of governments, imposing on their citizens a minority interpretation of Islam. Some in the movement call for the scope of their campaign to be global domination. The ‘Caliphate’ they seek to create would be a severe and repressive fourteenth-century literalist theocracy. They pursue its creation with gruesome violence and fear.”<sup>38</sup>

George W. Bush remarked in his *Decision Points* that he believes that the First Gulf War, fought by his father, was a complete success.<sup>39</sup> He was mistaken. In fact, the outcome of the First Gulf War was the first major strategic blunder of the United States in the post-Cold War world. America achieved a swift tactical and operational victory against Iraq. The primary goal of the American deployment to the Gulf, however, was to defend the Saudi oil fields. That Kuwait was liberated only put a few miles between the Iraqi Republican Guard and the Saudi Kingdom.

However, it did not neutralize the threat that Saddam Hussein posed. The fact that Saddam Hussein stayed in power necessitated for U.S. troops to remain in Saudi Arabia.<sup>40</sup> This proved bin Laden right in his own perception that America was occupying the holy lands for Muslims. It not only enraged him, but many Muslims in Saudi Arabia and beyond as well.

As the 1990s commenced in full swing, American interests around the globe expanded in Somalia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. But so did al Qaeda's. The first attack against U.S. interests came in December 1992 in Yemen. There were no American fatalities.<sup>41</sup> The U.S. involvement in Somalia and the subsequent withdrawal was perceived by al Qaeda and Bin Laden as a result of his involvement and help to General Mohamed Aidid in the Black Hawk Down incident in 1993, in which nineteen American soldiers were killed and seventy-three wounded. In bin Laden's eyes this was the third time, after Vietnam and Lebanon, the US had ran with a tail between her legs after a tough fight.<sup>42</sup>

Around the time of the first World Trade Center bombing, for which Osama bin Laden bears no responsibility,<sup>43</sup> the first warning of the threat of Osama bin Laden surfaced inside the CIA. It was a report by Gina Bennett in 1993, who also authored a second report on the founding of al Qaeda the same year.<sup>44</sup> In the 1993 bombing, seven died and 1042 were injured. The FBI successfully investigated, arrested and prosecuted almost all responsible for the attack, including the master mind Omar Abdel Rahman, the Blind Sheik,<sup>45</sup> who would later provide al Qaeda with the religious justification to specifically target civilians. Thus, it becomes clear, that by 1993, the CIA was aware of the persona Osama bin Laden and his organization, and a sense of confidence that law enforcement could effectively address the threat permeated.

Bin Laden declared war on America on 23 August 1996, only three months after his expulsion from Sudan and move to Afghanistan.<sup>46</sup> His purpose was to expel U.S. forces from

Saudi Arabia – the home of the two holiest cities in Islam. However, the threat he posed was for US officials laughable, as it came from one man in a remote cave who had no capability of following up on his promises.<sup>47</sup> By that time he had lost his Saudi citizenship and the monthly stipend from his family. Thus, bin Laden believed that the U.S. was behind all his troubles. His hate for America became personal, adding to his dislike for American foreign policy as a radical Islamist animosity.

Bin Laden's organization continued to grow in size and in influence. In 1998 Al-Qaeda and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, headed by Ayman al-Zawahiri, merged. Soon after, a joint declaration of war was issued against the U.S., the Egyptian and other governments. The fatwa, personally signed by bin Laden, called for the murder of all Americans as the individual duty of every Muslim.<sup>48</sup> The religious sanctioning of targeting civilians came in the form of another fatwa issued by the Blind Sheikh, now in US custody for his involvement in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, and distributed by his sons at a press conference organized by bin Laden in Afghanistan on 26 May 1998.<sup>49</sup>

The bombings on 7 August 1998 of the US Embassies in Tanzania and Kenya were perpetrated by al Qaeda, and were the first significant attack on US interests by the organization. The US responded by launching limited cruise missiles into Afghanistan and Sudan.<sup>50</sup> Undeterred, however, al Qaeda continued plotting, and developed plans for attacking numerous targets simultaneously around the turn of the millennium: the Millennium Alert. The bombing of the USS Cole was successful. A plan to bomb the Los Angeles airport was prevented by sheer luck.<sup>51</sup>

There had been other bombings against US interests in the early 1990s. Although many have not been proven to be the doing of al Qaeda, they might have been inspired in part by bin

Laden's anti-American sermons. Because of the late start in the 1990s of significant al Qaeda attacks against American targets, bin Laden was considered only as a terrorist financier, not a full terrorist himself during the better part of the decade. The fact that he was stateless and bankrupt, as a result of his expulsion from Sudan, only undermined his importance in the view of American leaders.<sup>52</sup> However, by the turn of the millennium, Osama bin Laden had become the only and supreme leader of the most dangerous international terrorist organization in the world, whose exclusive goal was to target American interests, and most of all, American civilians.<sup>53</sup>

Meanwhile, the United States had entered into political disarray, the second strategic blunder. American political leaders had no understanding of, and had come to no consensus about, what America's interests and objectives in the post-Cold War world should be. Instead a policy of get-involved-in-everything was adopted. If not a single objective could be selected, like the defeat of the Communist system during the Cold War, then all issues around the globe would be America's foreign objectives.

Richard Clarke claimed that during his first years of office, President Bill Clinton recognized terrorism "as the major post-Cold War threat and acted to improve counterterrorism capabilities," but because of political weakness and criticism from the Republic party he could not get the main actors, CIA, FBI and the Pentagon to work together on that issue.<sup>54</sup> He stated that at the time of the second declaration of war in 1998, the US government had been at war with Al-Qaeda for at least three years.<sup>55</sup> But if fighting terrorism was Clinton's top foreign policy priority, then the aggressive American commitment of military forces to humanitarian interventions, advocating for human rights, attempting to enable the United Nations, fighting organized crime, modernizing ex-Soviet nations, the mediation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and much more, hardly advances such a priority. Not to mention the nightmares of Pakistan's

test of a nuclear weapon.

In fact, President Clinton was reluctant to undertake what was necessary to be done in an anti-terrorist campaign. Launching large-scale military action against al Qaeda was never done, nor was there ever any consideration of denying the save heavens of first Sudan and later in Afghanistan. Of course, there was a predominant view within the military which considered terrorism a criminal activity. However, the military is at the disposal of the President to advance the policies and national security of the nation, not vice versa. And while some diplomatic pressure was exercised on the Taliban in the latter years of the 1990s, who were now in control of Afghanistan and harbored bin Laden and his organization, such efforts had only limited influence on individuals like Wakil Muttawakil, Taliban's foreign minister, but no influence on al Qaeda. How could it, since al Qaeda was a terrorist organization dedicated to the complete destruction of America?

There was also no effort to acquire reliable intelligence on al Qaeda as the CIA was never able to penetrate the terrorist organization. Instead, it relied on information from second, third, or fourth-hand sources with their own political or financial agendas.<sup>56</sup> And while there was an order for the head of Osama bin Laden,<sup>57</sup> the official policy of the administration was that al Qaeda and its leader was the same thing, making it sufficient to go after the leader and not the organization.<sup>58</sup> This shows the level of ignorance about the organization within the Administration. While the case of Osama bin Laden brought CIA and FBI to work together on a single project, their missions were completely different: FBI sought to gather evidence with the intention to capture and prosecute the Saudi, while the CIA wanted to kill him.<sup>59</sup>

In January 2001 a new administration – that of George W. Bush – took office. Nine months later, on 11 September 2001, al Qaeda achieved a deadly tactical surprise, perpetrating

the deadliest terrorist act on US soil and killing nearly 3000 people. Members of al Qaeda hijacked four commercial aircraft. Two were intentionally crashed into the towers of the World Trade Center, and one into the Pentagon. The fourth, United Flight 93, crashed in a field near Shanksville, PA after passengers fought back to regain control over the machine.<sup>60</sup> America's fight against terrorism had begun.

Afghanistan was America's first stop in the War on Terror, which was declared by President George W. Bush in an address to a joint session of Congress. However, this was not the first time, that the United States had been engaged in Afghanistan. Even before the Soviet invasion, the Carter Administration began delivering aid to anti-government elements within Afghanistan. Such efforts commenced on 3 July 1979. President Carter's National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski speculated that the aid prompted the Soviet invasion,<sup>61</sup> which began on 24 December 1979. Together with Saudi Arabia and the other Arab nations the United States took an active role in the struggle between Afghan Mujahedeen and the Red Army, by delivering, through Pakistani intelligence services, significant amounts of weapons and aid.<sup>62</sup> As part of this effort, the U.S. Government promoted the injection of foreign fighters into Afghanistan, an idea Saudi Arabia welcomed and took charge of. Osama bin Laden was one of those Arabians injected into the conflict by the Saudi government. He was empowered by Saudi intelligence services to recruit, move and train Arab volunteers in Afghanistan.<sup>63</sup>

After the Soviets pulled out from Afghanistan in February 1989, Afghanistan no longer constituted a strategic value to the United States. Thus, overnight, virtually all American resources were pulled out of the country and redirected elsewhere. Meanwhile the communist government in Kabul fell and a deadly war between rival tribes erupted. Kathy Ganon remarked, "The wider world had done the most dangerous of things. It had stuffed this tiny country with

massive amounts of weapons, including the precious Singers, had turned over the countryside to the volatile discordant mix of mujahedeen factions, and then had walked away.”<sup>64</sup>

To stabilize the country, Pakistan endorsed the Taliban.<sup>65</sup> The Taliban was a force that was directly funded and supported by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in an effort to bring an end to Afghanistan’s civil war.<sup>66</sup> Mullah Omar, leader and founder of the movement, was not well educated in matters other than the Qur’an. He taught in a madrasah in Sanghisar in the Afghan province of Kandahar. The Taliban were founded in 1994 by sixty men who had nationalistic motives to bring peace and order to Afghanistan. The Taliban’s initial objective was to seize a stretch of road from Sanghisar to Kandahar from marauding mujahedeen who demanded a road tax, and who instilled fear in the local population. Kathy Ganon noted, “Fear, war, and repression are like threads woven into the fabric of Afghans: fear of the Russians, of the mujahedeen, of the Arabs, of al Qaeda, Pakistanis, Americans, B-52 bombers, and of each other.”<sup>67</sup> The movement was born from the successful achievement of that goal. Hundreds of locals welcomed this new force of pure Muslims, untouched by politics, who brought with them peace. Thousands of young Pashtuns men – students, or Talib, in the Saudi-supported madrasahs in Pakistan<sup>68</sup> – from the refugee camps in Pakistan poured back into Afghanistan to join Mullah Omar. Pakistani support of the organization came after it had established a base in Kandahar.

As the Taliban conquered much of Afghanistan and rose to power, Afghans embraced their strict rules only to enjoy the blessings of peace, which was something that had been foreign to their lands since 1979.<sup>69</sup> The Taliban drew financial and logistical support from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The majority of their conscripts came from the madrasahs in Pakistan’s Afghan refugee areas, while the opium production – the Taliban protected the roads in exchange for 10% of the proceeds – became the main source of revenue.<sup>70</sup>

Osama Bin Laden was never invited to Afghanistan by the Taliban. Instead, his move there was convenient to the Saudis, who requested that the Taliban keep him quiet.<sup>71</sup> The declaration of war on the US by bin Laden in 1996 agitated elements of the Taliban. They had promised to the Saudis to keep him quiet, and had no quarrel with the US.<sup>72</sup> Bin Laden met Khalid Sheikh Mohammad a little after the former moved to Afghanistan. By then KSM had made a name for himself as the uncle of Ramzi Yousef, the perpetrator of the 1993 WTC bombing. It was during this meeting that the two men discussed the idea of training pilots to fly hijacked airplanes into buildings.<sup>73</sup>

While still coordinating the government efforts on 11 September 2001, Richard Clarke realized that al Qaeda was responsible for the attack he had been warning about, and that the response would not be confined to bombing their camps as was done after the embassy bombings in 1998, but a full-scale invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>74</sup> Events developed quickly. On 14 September 2001 NATO invoked Article 5 for the first time in its history. The world was with America and the war in Afghanistan was seen as completely just.<sup>75</sup> On 17 September 2001, Bush signed the orders to begin the attack on Afghanistan, with the CIA going in first; the same document included an order to revisit battle plans for Iraq.<sup>76</sup> By December 2001 the Taliban regime had been overthrown, and a transitional government under Hamid Karzai established. Although the war seemed over with an exceptional American victory, it was far from concluded. The critical mistake, and third strategic one since the end of the Cold War, was made in that that American officials failed to conceive the dynamics of the South-Asian region, and relied on Pakistan to seal the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, Pakistan's government has never been able to consolidate its control over the entire territory.<sup>77</sup> This provided an opportunity to bin Laden, by now the most wanted man on Earth, to successfully escape from the battle of Tora

Bora.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, the American forces, who fought with the upmost honor and valor, failed to secure a decisive victory in Afghanistan. They had been denied sufficient numbers, while by early 2002 the focus shifted on Iraq. Meanwhile, the civilian engagement in Afghanistan constituted no more than desultory reconstruction effort.<sup>79</sup> By 2006 the Taliban had returned and posed a significant security threat to the Afghan government, ISAF and civilians. They used tactics learned by al Qaeda in Iraq, namely, Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and suicide bombers, while Pakistan continued to provide a sanctuary and was unable to effectively fight the Taliban.<sup>80</sup>

In his 20 September 2001 address to Congress, President George W. Bush declared a war on terrorism. The war, the president declared “begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there.” Bush explained that America “will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism.” And that “Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.”<sup>81</sup> This included not only al Qaida, which was the organization responsible for the 11 September attacks, but also states of an “axis of evil,” a term the president coined in his first State of the Union address. That “axis of evil” included Iraq, Iran and North Korea.<sup>82</sup> Two months after 9/11, and the American forces on the verge of a perceived victory in Afghanistan, President Bush reiterated his desire to review battle plans for Iraq. The reason, as the president explained in his memoirs, was to “develop the coercive half of coercive diplomacy,” that he sought to adopt as a result of Saddam Hussein’s noncompliance with United Nations resolutions.<sup>83</sup> According to Bush, Iraq sponsored terrorism, was a sworn enemy of the United States, threatened its neighbors, violated international demands, repressed its people, and pursued the development of Weapons of Mass Destruction.<sup>84</sup> On 19 March 2001, he instructed “for the peace of the world and the benefit and freedom of the Iraqi people, I hereby give the

order to execute Operation Iraqi Freedom. May God bless the troops.”<sup>85</sup>

Critiques of the war have advanced a number of arguments. First critique was that the administration wanted to invade Iraq even before 9/11, and that the attacks themselves provided for the excuse to do so. A strong proponent of this view is Paul Pillar, who maintains that in considering the invasion of Iraq, there never was a political process to determine if invasion was in the interest of the United States. Rather, meetings were held on how to justify such an invasion.<sup>86</sup> Pillar holds that, the decision to go to Iraq came from reasons as diverse as the need to spread democracy in the Middle East and that Iraq was chosen to serve as the stepping stone to that neoconservative goal, the desire to acquire Iraq’s oil fields – Iraq does poses the greatest oil reserves in the Middle east – and the Neoconservative rhetoric during the 1990s – promoted within the Administration by Vice President Chaney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, and Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz - of the unfinished business of the First Gulf War and the need to remove Saddam Hussein from power.<sup>87</sup> In Pillar’s critiques, the October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate regarding Iraq’s possession of unconventional weapons had no impact on the president’s decision to invade Iraq, as the president had already decided on the war.<sup>88</sup> Peter Bergen joins in the view that from day one the focus of the 9/11 response of the Bush Administration was wrongfully on Iraq.<sup>89</sup> James Ridgeway points out that while Rumsfeld wanted to bomb Iraq, the President had noted that removing Saddam would be best, and that within 36 hours of 9/11 the decision to invade Iraq had been made.<sup>90</sup>

Another critique was the alleged “marriage” between international terrorism, 9/11 and Saddam’s government. According to Peter Bergen, such a theory had its roots in the work *Study of Revenge* by neoconservative scholar Laurie Mylroie, published in 2000, who, wrongfully according to Bergen, maintained that such a connection existed. Mylroie testified before the 9/11

Commission to the same thesis of Saddam's involvement with al Qaeda and international terrorism.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, Iraqi intelligence had been implicated in an assassination plot in 1993 against Former President George W. H. Bush during his visit to Kuwait. The attempt was prevented by Kuwaiti security services, and President Clinton responded by bombing the Iraqi Intelligence's Headquarters in June 1993. Subsequently, the American Intelligence Community has never founded evidence of further Iraqi involvement with terrorism against U.S interests.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, the proposition of an alliance between Osama bin Laden is ludicrous. Paul Pillar points out, "Saddam Hussein may have been willing to make a pact with the devil if he saw tactical advantage in doing so, his secular dictatorship was part of the very power structure in the Middle East that bin Laden was seeking to overthrow."<sup>93</sup> Bin Laden shared his intensive dislike for Saddam Hussein on the record with CNN's Peter Bergen during their interview in 1997.<sup>94</sup>

More isolationist critiques of the war held that although Saddam might have had unconventional weapons, his possession of such was not in itself a threat, since Iraq did not possess the delivery systems. Peter Bergen explains that to deliver his unconventional weapons, Saddam needed organizations like al Qaeda. The author convincingly argues that there was never such an alliance between Saddam Hussein and bin Laden's organization. Instead, the Administration had made the American public believe there was.<sup>95</sup>

Finally, taking the internationalist point of view, the Secretary of State Colin Power remarked, "The intelligence agencies elsewhere had arrived at similar, if not quite so apocalyptic, conclusions [that Iraq had WMDs]. Where others governments parted ways with the Bush administration, however, was on the imminence of the Iraqi threat and the manner in which to confront it. Even Blair had strong doubts about the key elements in Washington's case of urgent action: that Saddam had ties to al-Qaeda and might supply weapons of mass destruction to

the terrorists.”<sup>96</sup>

Bruce Hoffman reasons that the fear of a terrorist group acquiring Weapons of Mass Destruction from Iraqi stockpiles was the major reason for the 2003 invasion.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, President Clinton, as well as the governments of Germany, France, Great Britain, Russia, China and Egypt, did believe that Saddam Husain had unconventional weapons at his disposal.<sup>98</sup> President Bush proclaimed, “But after the nightmare of 9/11, I had vowed to do what was necessary to protect the country. Letting a sworn enemy of America refuse to account for his weapons of mass destruction was a risk I could not afford to take.”<sup>99</sup> While the president might have acted out of genuine beliefs, a point still much disputed, the timing and manner of the invasion of Iraq became the fourth major strategic blunder in American foreign policy in twelve years.

The invasion of Iraq has to be reviewed through two separate prisms. One is legality – both US domestic and international law. The legal battle over Iraq and its WMD program began with the conclusion of the First Gulf War and the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 687. The resolution mandated that Iraq destroy its entire biological, chemical and nuclear weapons stockpiles, dismantle all facilities that would allow the government to restart unconventional weapons development, destroy its missiles with range exceeding 150km.<sup>100</sup> While Saddam initially complied, in 1998 he expelled UN inspectors before they could verify the destruction of his unconventional weapons. America and Great Britain responded by launching Operation Desert Fox, a 4-day bombing campaign. In the address to the American people explaining his decision to bomb Iraq, President Clinton proclaimed, “The hard fact is that so long as Saddam remains in power, he threatens the wellbeing of his people, the peace of his region, and the security of the world. The best way to end that threat once and for all is with a new Iraqi government, a government ready to live in peace with its neighbors, a government that respects

the rights of its people.”<sup>101</sup> That same year Congress passed the Iraq Liberation Act. While the resolution, which with its passing of Congress on 31 October 1998, and signature of President Clinton became part of the law of the land, explicitly forbade the use of military force, it declared that “It should be the policy of the United States to support efforts to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq and to promote the emergence of a democratic government to replace that regime.”<sup>102</sup> Consequently, any sitting president of the United States, republican or democrat, was now bound to seek and support any means necessary, short of war, to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. In 2002, Congress authorized military action. In a 77 to 23 vote in the Senate and 296 to 133 in the House, Congress passed the *Authorization to Use Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002* on 16 October 2002.<sup>103</sup> Senators Clinton, Biden, Kerry, Edwards and Reid, who later would become ones of the more vocal critics of the Iraq war, voted for the resolution.<sup>104</sup>

The Congress authorized President Bush to invade Iraq because of a National Intelligence Estimate released in 2002 regarding Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction program. Professor Catherine Lotrionte, a Counsel to the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board at the White House at the time, explained that “The NIE sold the war to Congress.”<sup>105</sup> In its summary the intelligence estimate declared, “We [the senior analysts from CIA who prepared the estimate] judge that Iraq has continued its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs in defiance of UN resolutions and restrictions. Baghdad has chemical and biological weapons as well as missiles with ranges in excess of UN restrictions; if left unchecked, it probably will have a nuclear weapons during this decade.”<sup>106</sup> The document continued, “Since inspections ended in 1998, Iraq has maintained its chemical weapons efforts, energized its missile programs, and invested in biological weapons; in view of most agencies, Baghdad is reconstructing its nuclear

program,”<sup>107</sup> while concluding that “If Baghdad acquires sufficient fissile material from abroad it could make a nuclear weapon within several months to a year.”<sup>108</sup> As history proved only a year later, this report was wrong and its conclusions misled a Congress to authorize the use of force against a sovereign nation. Professor Lotrionte analyzed that the 2002 intelligence estimate, the National Intelligence Estimate being the highest level intelligence report the US Intelligence Community could produce, was not the best ever written, and that “It was fatally flawed.” It included no American sources inside Iraq, never collaborated information acquired by other nation’s intelligence agencies, and was written in too short of a time.<sup>109</sup> In his memoir, George Tenet – Director of the Central Intelligence Agency at the time of the writing of the report – confessed: “Yes, we at CIA had been wrong in believing that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction.”<sup>110</sup> Regardless of this error of intelligence, however, Congress authorized use of military force against Iraq, and thus, Operation Iraqi Freedom was legal as far as US domestic law was concerned.

International law, however, is different than US domestic law. The United Nations Charter explicitly forbids the unauthorized use of force by one member against another,<sup>111</sup> except when acting in self-defense, defined in terms of an armed aggression against the territorial integrity of a nation, or when assisting in the collective defense of other nations.<sup>112</sup> In all other instances, aggressive military action against a sovereign state can only be sanctioned with the explicit authorization by the United Nations Security Council under Chapter VII.<sup>113</sup>

The legality of Operation Iraqi Freedom, in terms of international law, has to be examined against these requirements. That Saddam had violated 16 UN Security Council Resolutions – considered binding under international law – cannot be disputed. At the time Saddam expelled UN inspectors, US intelligence showed that a substantial amount of biological

and chemical weapons were present in Iraq, and that there were some warheads unaccounted for. Furthermore, according to military analysts, unconventional weapons were highly desirable by the Iraqi regime because of the defeat during the First Gulf War.<sup>114</sup> Because of Saddam's noncompliance, President Bush concluded that "The only logical conclusion was that he had something to hide, something so important that he was willing to go to war for it."<sup>115</sup> The United Nations Security Council on 8 November 2002 unanimously adopted Resolution 1441, which provided the last opportunity for Iraq to comply with UN demands. The document stated that "1. Iraq has been and remains in material breach of relevant resolutions. 2. Is given final opportunity to comply. 3. Iraq will face serious consequences of it fails to comply."<sup>116</sup> While threatening with "serious consequences," Resolution 1441 did not authorize the use of military force; neither did the Security Council follow up with another resolution sanctioning such drastic measures. Thus, the only scenario under which the use of military force would have been justified by international law, was if Iraq physically initiated a military conflict and forced the United States to act out of self-defense or in collaboration with other states in collective defense. Since the end of the First Gulf War, this never occurred. Thus, as far as international law is concerned, Operation Iraqi Freedom was illegal.

The second prism through which we have to examine the invasion of Iraq is its practicality. In other words, how did this action – the use of military force against a sovereign nation – advance the foreign policy strategy of the United States? The short answer to this question is that because of its timing – less than two years after the 11 September terrorist attacks, the continuing Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and the ongoing war on terrorism – the Iraq invasion was a strategic miscalculation and mistake. This thesis was advanced by General Brent Scowcroft – National Security Advisor to Presidents Ford and

George W. H. Bush – in an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* in 2002. The General reasoned, “We will all be better off when he [Saddam Hussein] is gone,” while warning, “Our pre-eminent security priority – underscored repeatedly by the president – is the war on terrorism. An attack on Iraq at this time would seriously jeopardize, if not destroy, the global counterterrorist campaign we have undertaken.”<sup>117</sup> Scowcroft’s prediction was the best pre-war prediction any public figure had made. Not only did the war in Iraq unnecessarily draw the attention of American policy makers and planners, it stretched the resources of the United States military so thin that instead of the 3 to 1 rotations, 2 to 1 rotations were implemented,<sup>2</sup> while it also provided for the recruiting rhetoric al Qaeda so desperately needed at the time.

The American invasion of Iraq agitated many conservative-leaning Muslims, who called for a defensive jihad. This was one of the major contributing factors the revival of popular support for al Qaeda.<sup>118</sup> By the summer of 2003, the insurgency in Iraq was fully developed, something that provided the perfect opportunity for bin Laden’s organization to rebuild itself in the same manner that the 1980s war in Afghanistan had allowed it to be created. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi became the leader of a group known as al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).<sup>119</sup> AQI was directly responsible for the 19 August 2003 bombing of the UN mission in Iraq, which precipitated UN withdrawal from Iraq and the February 2006 bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra, the purpose of which was to start a civil war and make AQI appear as the protector of Sunnis.<sup>120</sup> Intelligence analysts have concluded from intelligence gathered by US forces in Iraq, that the majority of suicide bombers in Iraq were foreigners for whom AQI was directly responsible.<sup>121</sup> Peter Bergen reasoned, “Just as bin Laden made a large strategic error in attacking the United States on 9/11, so too President Bush – having presided over the campaign in Afghanistan that

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<sup>2</sup> 3-to-1 rotation refers to the best rotation of military forces in a combat zone. Ideally, for every 1 unit engaged in combat, there will be 1 actively training to replace it, and 1 will be resting.

came close to destroying Al-Qaeda – would make his own deeply flawed decision to attack Iraq, which breathed new life into bin Laden’s holy war.”<sup>122</sup>

A major problem in both wars was the lack of strategic thinking, which then could be channeled to actionable operational and tactical instructions for the forces in the field. In fact, the overall missions in each conflict changed numerous times. Most notably, the insurgencies that developed had been equated to terrorism, a mistake that has caused great confusion over what terrorism is, and how it should be fought. It is mind boggling how a war on terrorism can be declared, but there could be no understanding of what terrorism actually is. Thus, before exploring the nature of the terrorism threat that the United States will face in the future, it is necessary to define the terminology.

Bruce Hoffman provides the most extensive and authoritative theoretical analysis and definition of terrorism in his masterpiece *Inside Terrorism*. According to him terrorism is a term whose meaning has changed over the course of 200 years, but today is understood to involve a political aim, and the pursuit, acquisition and use of power to achieve a political goal. At its core Hoffman argues, terrorism is a tactic to achieve an objective. He says “Terrorism is thus violence – or, equally important, the threat of violence – used and directed in pursuit of, or in service of, a political aim.”<sup>123</sup>

The tactics employed by modern jihadi terrorist movements of indiscriminate targeting of civilians, transportation networks and symbolic structures was not their original idea. It was developed by the Irish nationalistic movement “Clan na Gael” and their allies, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, during the “dynamite campaign” in England in late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Clan na Gael was based in the United States, which also makes it the first transnational terrorist movement.<sup>124</sup>

The UN has sought to define what terrorism is by holding International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings. It outlawed any act of bombing (terrorism) that intends to cause death, and is against public places, transportation networks and government facilities. Such a declaration, Hoffman argues, does not discriminate between state and non-state actors, and equates WWII targeting of civilian centers by Luftwaffe and Allied Air Force to terrorist organizations, which in his opinion must be done.<sup>125</sup>

Hoffman further observes that unlike common criminals, terrorists refuse to admit to the nature of their acts as terror, but instead call themselves freedom fighters, soldiers or warriors, and claim all the protections given to captured prisoners of war. They claim that their lack of numbers, firepower and delivery systems forces them to use the techniques of clandestine terror.<sup>126</sup> Hoffman also points out that terrorism must be distinguished from insurgency and guerilla warfare. While all employ similar tactics of coercion to achieve a political goal, there are several critical differences: guerrillas operate as military units and attack military targets, seize and control territories and seek to acquire sovereignty over a particular region and population. In addition to those, insurgencies seek to mobilize the local population by means of propaganda; terrorists do none of these.<sup>127</sup>

Finally, says Hoffman, “We may therefore now attempt to define terrorism as the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change. All terrorist acts involve violence or the threat of violence. Terrorism is specifically designed to have far-reaching psychological effects beyond the immediate victim(s) or object of the terrorist attack. It is meant to instill fear within, and thereby intimidate, a wider ‘target audience’ that might include a rival ethnic or religious group, an entire country, a national government or political party, or public opinion in general. Terrorism is designed to

create power where there is none or to consolidate power where there is very little. Through the publicity generated by their violence, terrorists seek to obtain the leverage, influence and power they otherwise lack to effect political change on either a local or an international scale.”<sup>128</sup>

So then, what is the nature of the threat that terrorism possess to the United States? A look at the development of terrorism since 9/11 holds the answer. Every year the Heritage Foundation publishes a report on terrorist-related incidents that have occurred inside the United States, including successful attacks, distorted plots, arrests, and others. Of the forty-two terrorist incidents in the United States mainland, three were successful: the shooting by a man acting alone at Los Angel’s airport in 2002 in hopes of influencing American policy in favor of the Palestinians, and killing 3 people;<sup>129</sup> the shooting outside of a military recruiting station in Little Rock in 2009 that killed one, by a man who claimed ties to al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula;<sup>130</sup> and the shooting in Fort Hood in 2009 by a suspected but unconfirmed al Qaeda member, which claimed thirteen lives.<sup>131</sup> Of the 39 plots that had been foiled since 9/11, 18 have been by either self-proclaimed followers of al Qaeda, have been influenced by its ideology, or had an agenda of their own. Three cases involved homegrown terrorists with some remote link to al Qaeda affiliates, or who have made an unsuccessful attempt to contact the group; four of the foiled cases have been confirmed, or reasonable suspicion exists, to have been directly linked to al Qaeda – the Liquid bomber of 2006, the 2009 arrest of Najibullah Zazi, the 2009 Christmas bomber and the 2010 Air Cargo Bomb Plot. This brings the total number of al Qaeda terrorist plots, confirmed and suspected, successful and unsuccessful, against the continental United States to 6 out of 42 while the name al Qaeda, homegrown, confirmed and suspected, appears on 9 out of the 42 incidents.<sup>132</sup>

Thirty-six out of the forty-two terrorism-related incidents that occurred in the continental

United States after 11 September 2001 have been the work of lone wolves or cells unaffiliated to any particular terrorist organization. This includes the anthrax attack through the United States Postal Service that killed 5 people and was first revealed on 5 October 2001, which was perpetrated by a lone scientist inspired al Qaeda.<sup>133</sup> Thus the greatest terrorism threat to the United States stems from leaderless terrorism, which includes but is not limited to the leaderless jihad that Hoffman calls “one of the most important trends in terrorism today.” Such actors have no clear-cut aim but religious or political motivation to kill indiscriminately. Such terrorists do not claim their acts nor do they follow up with demands. Examples of this form of terrorism include Pan Am 103, Buenos Aires Jewish bombings, Oklahoma City bombings, and others.<sup>134</sup> Because of the tactical successes in the war of terrorism, international terrorist organizations no longer have a top down structure and thus cannot be called organizations, but rather they are a flat network of loosely-affiliated terrorist cells which have been influenced and inspired by Osama bin Laden.

Before 9/11, the conventional wisdom about terrorism was that it sought acts not so much to kill but to draw attention to a specific cause. Thus, there was no need to use WMDs, because they could defeat their purpose. Mass, indiscriminate murder would certainly provoke a significant response.<sup>135</sup> While today nuclear terrorism is unlikely, it is a distinct possibility in the future. So far nuclear terrorism has failed to inflict any sort of significant damage, most prominently because of lack of effective delivery systems. However, as al Qaeda has shown, the imperative to acquire such weapons technology remains. According to Hoffman, the detonation of a dirty bomb, conventional explosive with radioactive material discernment, is a more realistic threat.<sup>136</sup>

The fall of al Qaeda began on 9/11, which was a tactical victory, but complete strategic

failure. Contrary to bin Laden's calculations, the US did not retreat as it had done before. Instead, it occupied Afghanistan and Iraq, took away his sanctuary and destroyed the organization.<sup>137</sup> Four branches of the organization can be identified. Al Qaeda Central is what is left from the structure of the organization pre-9/11 and is currently located in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. Before 9/11, al Qaida was a highly bureaucratic organization with policies and committees, addressing issues such as pay grade, leave and vacation, training, finance, public relations, planning, and agriculture.<sup>138</sup> Peter Bergen remarked, "Rather than an ad hoc collection of like-minded jihadists who had gathered in Afghanistan in the late 1990s, as some had portrayed it, al-Qaida was, in fact, one of the most bureaucratic terrorist organizations in history."<sup>139</sup> This organization continues to strive to overthrow Middle Eastern regimes and establish Taliban-like ones, expel western troops and influence out of the region, and it still believes that attacking the far enemy will cause near enemy to crumble.<sup>140</sup> While the attacks plotted directly by al Qaeda, not only in the United States, but across the globe constituted the best organized and sophisticated plots in the post-9/11 era, including the London bombings and Zazi's plot to target the New York City Subway, Osama bin Laden's death delivered a devastating blow to the organization.<sup>141</sup> Bin Laden was the main driving force within the organization. His fundamental understanding of jihad was that it was the fundamental duty of every Muslim to kill non-believers, which was rooted in an extremist interpretation of the more militant verses of the Qur'an.<sup>142</sup> Divisions regarding this philosophy occurred early in the organization, including decent from Abu Hafs the Mauritanian and religious advisor to bin Laden who believed that killing civilians could not be justified on religious grounds.<sup>143</sup> Thus it remains to be seen to what extent al Qaeda will continue to effectively target civilians, if at all. With the death of bin Laden, al Qaeda also lost its most effective propaganda tool, bin Laden himself. The

Saudi had remarked that 90% of his battle was conducted in the media.<sup>144</sup> All of this is now gone for al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda has also lost its appeal to many of its previous supporters because of four critical flaws that Peter Bergen believes will bring it down in the long term. Those include the fact that al Qaeda's greatest numbers of victims are Muslims; that the organization's lack of a positive alternative philosophy for the future; the militant's inability to compromise; and the alienation of everyone who does not share their apocalyptic views, majority of whom are other Muslims.<sup>145</sup>

Second, there are the al Qaeda Affiliates and Associates, who have some form of benefit from al Qaeda Central. They are spread throughout Uzbekistan, Chechnya, Bosnia, Kashmir and other regions. These include former organizations like al Qaeda in Iraq, and current ones like al Qaeda in Yemen and al-Shabaab in Somalia. While some of these organizations continue to advance the overall mission of al Qaeda by attempting to attack the United States directly, they have much lesser expertise and experience in organizing significant plots. The Air Cargo Plot is a prime example.<sup>146</sup> Some of these organizations, like al-Shabaab, are not even terrorist organizations, despite their inclusion in the State Department's list of terrorist organizations, but are rather local insurgents who sought the help of al Qaeda in their fight against a government they perceive as illegitimate.

Third, there are the al Qaeda locals, who are individual sympathizers that receive limited support and operate independently, like Ahmed Rassam from Canada. Generally such individuals have travelled to Pakistan and have received specialized training in al Qaeda camps. Such individuals present a formidable challenge to security services, because unlike a particular terrorist organization, their primary goal is to cause mass casualties with no particular political

aims. Furthermore, operating independently reduces the opportunity for law enforcement and intelligence agencies to intercept and prevent their plots. Allegedly, two of the successful operations in the United States in the post-9/11 world were such operations.

Finally, there is the al Qaeda Network, which consists of homegrown cells, usually converts with no connection to the terrorist organization. Instead, they are inspired by al Qaeda and bin Laden's message. Such individuals or tiny groups have received no formal training, but rather are acquiring their body of knowledge and supplies on their own.<sup>147</sup> Examples of acts perpetrated by such groups include the Madrid bombers and the assassin behind Theo Van Gogh's murder.<sup>148</sup>

As the recent shooting in Norway by a right-wing extremist shows, the threat of terrorism is not confined to extremist jihadists. While the claim can be made, that no such organization has operated inside the United States for almost 20 years, one only needs to recall the horrors suffered as a result of the actions by Timothy McVeigh, who had no formal organizational support in perpetrating the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing.<sup>149</sup> Daniel Byman says, "The United States remains vulnerable to violence, whether terrorist or not. School shootings at Columbine and Virginia Tech and the deaths that surrounded the attack on Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords are painful reminders of how easy it is for angry or deluded individuals to pick up a gun and kill large numbers of people. Indeed, with this reminder, the relative safety of the U.S. homeland from terrorists since 9/11 becomes all the more remarkable."<sup>150</sup>

Having these threats in mind, as well as the lessons from the past 20 years, we can now turn to a set of recommendations. The United States needs to undertake the following steps that will improve its standing in the world and as a result its security. First there needs to be an overarching American purpose in foreign policy. Such a grand strategy can be the advancement

of the United Nations; or human rights; or ecology; or colonizing Mars. While this is subjected to extensive debate, a decision needs to be made. As argued above, the overarching reason for 9/11 was the lack of a clear strategic understanding of the consequences of particular foreign policies. In this context, the United States must be cautious when and how it intervenes in the internal affairs of other nations. The track record over the past thirty years has not been good. A pattern is observed – the United States is quick to undertake military action, but does so without a clear objective or the necessary strength of force to achieve decisive victory. Such was the case in Afghanistan, when American forces were committed without a clear understanding of the local population, objectives or end strategy. Or when there has been an objective – in Afghanistan the initial objective was to hunt down al Qaeda – it is a tactical and not strategic one. A similar example is the American involvement in Libya, where the United States’ forces are now directly responsible for the ensuing of a military stalemate because of American leader’s unwillingness to either commit the necessary forces to bring the conflict to an end, or give the proper objective of targeting the highest levels of the command and control structure of the Kaddafi loyalists. A third example of this is the First Gulf War. American troops defeated Iraqi forces, but American leaders failed to pursue the strategic objectives. As a result of this failure a significant number of American soldiers remained in Saudi Arabia. The end results of this failed policy are all too painfully known.

The American public and leaders must also accept that law enforcement and intelligence community will not be able prevent every single terrorist act on U.S soil. As Paul Pillar says, “We should not be surprised to be surprised – and here I refer to tactical surprise, which is harder to reduce let alone eliminate, than strategic surprise, chiefly because it involves unobservable and perhaps unattainable things such as an adversary’s secret plans.”<sup>151</sup> That is not to say that

improvements cannot be made. The US is still relying on tactical information to prevent future tactical surprises, while undermining the importance of strategic policies.<sup>152</sup> While this is important, it also must work towards the solution of grievances that prompt large numbers of people to embrace terrorism. In the Islamic world, the Israeli-Palestinian and the Indo-Pakistani conflicts remain the most significant. Bringing those two disputes to a negotiated closure has to be the top foreign policy priority for the United States.

Resolution of the Pakistani-Indian conflict has to be of highest priority because the two nations are nuclear powers. Pakistan has never been able to secure the entirety of its border, which has allowed for terrorist organizations, including al Qaeda to take refuge in the uncontrolled regions on the Afghan border. Furthermore, when the US and Pakistan work together they provide a formidable challenge to militants. For example, the capture of Khalid Sheik Mohamed in 2003 was a joint CIA-Pakistani Army operation.<sup>153</sup> From 9/11 to 2006, Pakistan had transferred custody of 369 suspected militants to U.S. authorities.<sup>154</sup>

According to Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur, the dispute over Kashmir remains the primary source of regional tensions and will be the likely cause of any future war between India and Pakistan. Kashmir is heavily Muslim populated, but when its Hindu governor refused to recognize the settlement of the creation of a Muslim and a Hindu state with the withdrawal of Britain a war between the two nations erupted. Four wars have been fought between India and Pakistan over the last 60 years: 1947, 1965, 1971 (Bangladesh) and 1989.<sup>155</sup>

One idea for the resolution of the Kashmiri dispute, that is consistent with Pakistan's declared acceptable terms, is for India to allow either the annexation of the province into the territory of Pakistan or its independence. To sweeten the pot for India, if its government agrees to such a resolution, the United States can, with the help of the Permanent Five, guarantee India's

permanent seat on the Security Council. Such a settlement would require extensive American diplomacy, one that would include China and Russia, and will require extensive concessions on all sides. However, achieving such a settlement has the potential of defusing the tensions on the most dangerous border in the world. Speaking to an audience in Washington DC on 21 July 2011, former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf reiterated the point that everything that Pakistan does in matters of internal and foreign affairs – support for militants, support for the Taliban, development of nuclear weapons, and others – is as a direct result of its tensions with India.<sup>156</sup>

Finally, being the dominant superpower in the world presents the United States with certain benefits as well as dangers. In the words of Richard Clarke, “When the Cold War ended, the United States could move massively into the Persian Gulf during a crisis there, ethnic and religious tensions could erupt in the Balkans and Central Asia, and religious fervor could no longer be directed at the Communists. Those feeling disadvantaged by the global system and wishing to blame their lot on foreign forces had only one world-dominant nation to blame for their troubles, one major target to motivate their followers: America.”<sup>157</sup> Developing a comprehensive strategic foreign policy and tackling the gravest international grievances will strengthen American’s standing in the world. There will, however, always be a number, however small, of individuals who would have the deepest of hatred for the United States, its people and what it stands for. While American security agencies should adapt to the changing nature of the threat, American domestic and foreign strategic objectives have to remain undeterred by such individuals. In this sense, the greatest mistake American leaders made in the post-9/11 world was the way they overreacted to the event, and the way they allowed twenty zealots to steer the policies of the strongest nation on earth.

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- <sup>1</sup> *9/11 Commission Report: The Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), xv.
- <sup>2</sup> Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton, *Without Precedent: the Inside Story of the 9/11 Commission* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2006), 14.
- <sup>3</sup> Kean and Hamilton, *Without Precedent*, 14-33.
- <sup>4</sup> *9/11 Commission Report*, 367-328.
- <sup>5</sup> Paul Pillar, *Intelligence and US Foreign Policy* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2011), 2.
- <sup>6</sup> James Ridgeway, *The 5 Unanswered Question About 9/11: What the 9/11 Commission Failed to Tell Us* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 91.
- <sup>7</sup> Pillar, *Intelligence and US Foreign Policy*, 5.
- <sup>8</sup> Peter Bergen, *The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict Between American and al Qaeda* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 39-40.
- <sup>9</sup> Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 7-31.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-86.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.
- <sup>15</sup> Richard Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 38-39.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-57.
- <sup>17</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 265-266.

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- <sup>18</sup> Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 40-41.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., 102.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., 103.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., 112-115.
- <sup>22</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 248.
- <sup>23</sup> Kathy Ganon, *I is for Infidel: From Holy War to Holy Terror: 18 Years Inside Afghanistan* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005), 41.
- <sup>24</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 250.
- <sup>25</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 258.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., 331.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 22-23.
- <sup>28</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 187.
- <sup>29</sup> Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 53-54.
- <sup>30</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 119-120.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., 110.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., 105.
- <sup>33</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 16.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., 19.
- <sup>35</sup> Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 43.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., 47.
- <sup>37</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 156-157.
- <sup>38</sup> Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 36.
- <sup>39</sup> George W Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2010), 226.

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- <sup>40</sup> Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, x.
- <sup>41</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 20.
- <sup>42</sup> Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 84-89.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.
- <sup>44</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 36.
- <sup>45</sup> Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 78-79.
- <sup>46</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 21-22.
- <sup>47</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 234 – 235.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.
- <sup>49</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 29-30.
- <sup>50</sup> Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 181-190.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 205-226.
- <sup>52</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 246.
- <sup>53</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 24-25.
- <sup>54</sup> Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, x.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 153-154.
- <sup>56</sup> James Ridgeway, *The 5 Unanswered Question About 9/11: What the 9/11 Commission Failed to Tell Us* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 94-95.
- <sup>57</sup> Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 204.
- <sup>58</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 40-42.
- <sup>59</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 241-242.
- <sup>60</sup> *9/11 Commission Report*, 10-14
- <sup>61</sup> Ridgeway, *The 5 Unanswered Question About 9/11*, 128-129.

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- <sup>62</sup> Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 52.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.
- <sup>64</sup> Ganon, *I is for Infidel*, 8-9.
- <sup>65</sup> Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 52-53.
- <sup>66</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 225-226.
- <sup>67</sup> Ganon, *I is for Infidel*, xiii.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-31.
- <sup>69</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 230-231.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 227-228.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 235-236.
- <sup>74</sup> Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 17-18.
- <sup>75</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 59.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 174-183.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 184-185.
- <sup>81</sup> George W Bush, *Address to Joint Session of Congress* (20 September 2001)
- <sup>82</sup> Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 19.
- <sup>83</sup> Pillar, *Intelligence and US Foreign Policy*, 234.
- <sup>84</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*, 228.

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- <sup>85</sup> Ibid., 223.
- <sup>86</sup> Pillar, *Intelligence and US Foreign Policy*, 13.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid., 15-20.
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid., 35.
- <sup>89</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 53.
- <sup>90</sup> Ridgeway, *The 5 Unanswered Question About 9/11*, 82-83.
- <sup>91</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 134-136.
- <sup>92</sup> Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 79-84.
- <sup>93</sup> Pillar, *Intelligence and US Foreign Policy*, 44.
- <sup>94</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 131-132.
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid., 132.
- <sup>96</sup> Karen DeYoung, *Soldier: The life of Colin Power* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2006), 422.
- <sup>97</sup> Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 19-20
- <sup>98</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*, 242.
- <sup>99</sup> Ibid., 224.
- <sup>100</sup> UNSC Resolution 687.
- <sup>101</sup> William J. Clinton, *Address to the Nation* (16 December 1998).
- <sup>102</sup> Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, Public Law 105-338, HR 4655.
- <sup>103</sup> Authorization to Use Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002, Public Law 107-243.
- <sup>104</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*, 241.
- <sup>105</sup> Prof. Catherine Lotrionte, interview with author.
- <sup>106</sup> National Intelligence Estimate, *Iraq's Continuing Program for Weapons of Mass Destruction*, (NIE: 2002-16HC), 5.

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- <sup>107</sup> Ibid., 5.
- <sup>108</sup> Ibid., 5.
- <sup>109</sup> Lotrionte, interview with author.
- <sup>110</sup> George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 480.
- <sup>111</sup> UN Charter, Article 2, Paragraph 4.
- <sup>112</sup> Ibid., Article 51.
- <sup>113</sup> Ibid., Chapter VII, Articles 39 to 50.
- <sup>114</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2004), 833
- <sup>115</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*, 224.
- <sup>116</sup> UNSC Resolution 1441.
- <sup>117</sup> Brent Scowcroft, “Op-Ed”, *The Wall Street Journal* (15 August 2002).
- <sup>118</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 171.
- <sup>119</sup> Ibid., 157-160.
- <sup>120</sup> Ibid., 162-164.
- <sup>121</sup> Ibid., 167-168.
- <sup>122</sup> Ibid., 155.
- <sup>123</sup> Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 2-3.
- <sup>124</sup> Ibid., 9-11.
- <sup>125</sup> Ibid., 25.
- <sup>126</sup> Ibid., 26.
- <sup>127</sup> Ibid., 35.
- <sup>128</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

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<sup>129</sup> CNN, *Los Angeles airport shooting kills 3* (July 4, 2002) [http://articles.cnn.com/2002-07-04/us/la.airport.shooting\\_1\\_el-al-gunman-yakov-aminov?\\_s=PM:US](http://articles.cnn.com/2002-07-04/us/la.airport.shooting_1_el-al-gunman-yakov-aminov?_s=PM:US)

<sup>130</sup> James Dao, "Man Claims Terror Ties in Little Rock Shooting," *New York Times* (21 January 2010).

<sup>131</sup> Ana Campoy et. al., "Hash Browns, Then 4 Minutes of Chaos: Role of Texas Shooter's Muslim Faith Is Examined; Policewoman Hailed as Hero," *The Wall Street Journal* (9 November 2009).

<sup>132</sup> Jena McNeill, et al. "39 Terror Plots Foiled Since 9/11: Examining Counterterrorism's Success Stories," *Background* (2011).

<sup>133</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 96.

<sup>134</sup> Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 271-272.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>136</sup> Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 275-280.

<sup>137</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 46-94.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

<sup>141</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 199.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>146</sup> Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 285-289.

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 285-289.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 285-289.

<sup>149</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 202.

<sup>150</sup> Daniel Byman, “Norway’s Oklahoma City?” *Foreign Affairs*, 22 July 2011,

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<sup>151</sup> Pillar, *Intelligence and US Foreign Policy*, 337.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 338.

<sup>153</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War*, 253.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>155</sup> Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur, *India, Pakistan and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 9-21.

<sup>156</sup> Pervez Musharraf, “Prepared Remarks” (address at the Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington DC, 21 July 2011)

<sup>157</sup> Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 71.

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