

## **Our Current Policies Increase Terrorism An Urgent Call for a New World Vision**

**Since** our invasion of Iraq, acts of terrorism around the world have increased by over 100%, including in areas beyond Iraq such as Chechnya, Palestine and Jakarta. This is because of a profound misunderstanding on our part of the causes of terrorism, resulting not only in our continued pursuit of the very actions that spawn terrorism, but also in the neglect of actions and policies that could truly and successfully lead to its demise.

We have asked our soldiers to represent us in Iraq, and they have responded magnificently, selflessly and courageously — as American soldiers always will. It is for them that we must be so certain we are truly right before we enter a war.

### **The Rise of Terrorism ... Again**

Terrorists are not a new or mysterious phenomenon in history. They have been present throughout the more than 6,000 years of recorded history and can be readily studied. The actions that have been taken to counter terrorism, both successful and unsuccessful, can be examined and understood. The terrorists in today's Middle East are not unique, nor are their motives and methods opaque. They are much the same as terrorists in all parts of the world and in all periods of history — whether the Spanish under Napoleon, the IRA under England, the Algerians under the French, the Scythians under Darius I of Persia, the Boers under England, the Vietcong under the French and the United States, or the Shining Path under Peru.

**Why does terrorism occur?** The seeds of today's terrorism are not found in the Muslim religion, but rather in the extreme poverty of most citizens of Middle Eastern countries, a poverty that has been among the most heartbreaking and ruinous in the world. The income of these peoples has dropped tragically in the past ten years, both in absolute terms and by almost half in relative terms as compared to the rest of the world. In this state of extreme poverty, any nation or region would be fertile ground for terrorism, just as our ghettos are fertile ground for gang warfare.

In the case of al Qaeda and related groups, terrorism is also rooted in the inevitable reaction to massive societal change.<sup>1</sup> Rapid modernization is one such change, disrupting tradition, social order, family structure, sources and predictability of income, and other foundational aspects of life. It often leaves people, especially the poor, reaching out to retrieve this lost order through fundamentalism — a reaction which, in the broad sweep of history, has sometimes been seen to erupt in hate and violence. In this respect, terrorism is a desperate attempt to defend a rapidly crumbling order, and thus restore the shredding fabric of societies, families, communities and lives.

Middle Easterners today are faced with both oppressive poverty and rapid modernization — dual extremes virtually unprecedented in history and both proven factors in the rise of terrorism.<sup>2</sup> Terrorism (or guerilla warfare, or whatever other label may apply) is always conducted by a group that feels oppressed and has significantly fewer resources than its perceived oppressor. Given that relative paucity of resources, terrorism is not a last resort — it is their only resort.

In responding to this fundamentalist terrorism, we should remember the lessons of more than 6000 years of history: Terrorism “is and always has been the very essence of how the weak make war against the strong.”<sup>3</sup> To overcome inferiority and resources in numbers, terrorists employ secrecy, deception and fear as their ultimate tools. They move when least expected, and invariably in a way that will maximize impact. By luring their adversaries into endless, futile pursuit, terrorists erode more than their enemy's strength; they successfully chip away at psyche and morale. Terrorists have little if anything to lose, therefore their inferiority in numbers and resources is easily overcome by their desperation — they have nothing but time and nowhere else to go. “An astounding number of other

world powers, large and small, have been humbled by guerilla war in this past century alone.”<sup>3</sup> Do we remember that in Vietnam over a million Vietnamese died as compared to 50,000 Americans ... and yet we lost? Simply stated and with ideology aside, they had already lost almost everything and had very little else to lose. It was their home, and we were halfway around the world from ours.

So if you want to stop terrorism, do you attack the terrorists or do you try to understand their issues? Whether their cause is right or not, the important part is that terrorists believe passionately that they are right. Terrorists are not inherently malevolent. They are filled with passion and a sense of being aggrieved — as true of al Qaeda as the Palestinians under Israel, the Algerians under the French, the IRA under England and the Spanish under Napoleon.

Al Qaeda has expressed clearly its immediate concerns, which are both well-known and in an extreme form reflect the broader, long-held concerns of the Muslim community. They view U.S. foreign policy and aid to be heavily biased in favor of Israel and a significant threat to Islam. And they believe it is an abomination that the U.S. Military has had a presence on sacred Islamic soil in Saudi Arabia as part of the First Gulf War and continuing to the present. We may not agree with these widely held objections, but we should not overlook them in a misconceived search for different, hidden or more sinister motives.

History shows decisively that, over the long haul, attacking terrorism increases terrorism. And indeed, that is what is happening right now across the world. As long as they feel aggrieved or attacked, there is nobility and importance in their cause, and their membership rolls increase. When they are no longer aggrieved or attacked, membership declines.

Given oppressive poverty and rapid modernization and its fearful, fundamentalist response in the continuing rise of terrorism — which, in turn, historically surmounts traditional military reactions — how then should we respond?

## **A Thoughtful Response: What We Should Do**

**First, we should pursue terrorists aggressively.** Terrorism as an international movement relies on, in part, its leaders and the weapons with which to conduct their activities. By identifying and isolating these individuals and interrupting their access to the tools of disseminating their fear and anger, we have an opportunity to replace their influence with new seeds of prosperity and peace. Going into Iraq diluted our efforts in this regard. We should both continue to intelligently pursue true terrorists and increase our efforts to monitor and control the development of nuclear weapons — perhaps our world’s greatest long-term threat. One of the great tragedies of our action in Iraq is that it has damaged the credibility and effectiveness that we can bring to these infinitely more important tasks. In pursuing terrorists, however, we should be realistic enough to know that a terrorist leader killed or captured is often quickly replaced from within and often attains a martyr’s status as a result.

**Second, we should make meaningful progress solving the ongoing, intractable problems in key areas that directly affect the Islamic world, including Palestine, Chechnya and Kashmir.** These are among the most difficult of all possible international problems, but making meaningful progress toward balanced resolutions is imperative and fundamental to the issue of reducing global terrorism. Incredibly, this has been lost in the shuffle of international policies and priorities for the U.S.

**Third, we should build up trade with enlightened Muslim countries.** Trade is the mechanism for building up prosperity. If abject poverty is a major part of the issue, then creating broad prosperity is a key part of the solution. War increases poverty. In contrast, trade has consistently proven to be the surest route to increased prosperity for those peoples on both sides of the trading. A citizen of any nation whose livelihood is, in part, dependent on trade (with the U.S. and with others) will be more inclined toward international peace and cooperation. Terrorism will decrease as wealth increases and

is more widely distributed. Our objective should be the wider dispersion of property and capital within these countries — beyond the power elite. We should encourage movement toward governments where power is more widely distributed and thus more representative, and we should make our support conditional where that will positively influence the conduct of repressive regimes. With this strategy, we can track progress and measure success, directly and quantitatively, by the amount and increase in trade with these countries, the per capita GNP of these countries and the distribution of wealth in these countries. And we can publish and share the success of our efforts measured not by body counts, but by the bounteous fruit of honest labor and trade.

**Fourth, we should dramatically lower our profile in Iraq.** The benefit of a reduced presence is slowly beginning to be acknowledged, even within the military. General Peter J. Shoomaker has said, “Sometimes the best way is to be less present.”<sup>4</sup> And former Special Forces officer Keith W. Mines said, “The presence of foreign security forces is provoking the very instability that must diminish in order for the process to work.”<sup>4</sup> If, as a nation, we choose to stay and fight the growing insurgency, there is little to be gained and much to be lost. The goal has already become not democracy but stability — by almost any means, at a cost of over \$100 billion per year and at an accelerating cost in lives on both sides. And there is an even more costly political dilemma: Since the surest path toward short-term stability is the installation of another oppressive regime (whether under Allawi or someone else), staying in Iraq will again put the U.S. in the unacceptable position of claiming victory by the creation of oppression.

## **A Thoughtful Response: What We Should NOT Do**

**We should be careful not to use the rhetoric of self-righteousness, haughtiness or power.** Our response to the stunning terrorist blow we received should have been equal parts force against al Qaeda and the Taliban, and outreach to the peoples of the Middle East and to the many nations whose hearts ached with ours. Instead, our response was comprised almost entirely of force and arrogance, accompanied by the rhetoric and symbolism of self-righteousness and vengeance. Even in a justified pursuit, to use words like “dead or alive” or “bring ‘em on” stands in contrast to the words of our forefathers, who instead inspired a nation with messages of love, forgiveness, humility and healing. We recall Lincoln in his Second Inaugural Address, “with malice toward none, with charity for all” ... or Washington in his farewell address to Congress, “Observe good faith and justice toward all nations. Cultivate peace and harmony with all.” Are these not still the values by which we wish to be judged and represented in the world? Friendship, respect and love are far more powerful than force and vengeance will ever be.

**We should not preemptively attack.** We were right to invade Afghanistan. Al Qaeda had viciously attacked us on 9/11, and a concentration of their financial support and training bases were in Afghanistan. We had asked the Taliban leaders of Afghanistan for assistance in pursuing al Qaeda, which they rebuffed. We were right to invade Afghanistan, but we have been wrong in abandoning Afghanistan and ceding the country back to the Taliban and the warlords. Lawlessness has returned, the Taliban are reestablished and Afghanistan is again the number one producer of opium in the world. It is the most prominent economic resource they know, and we have not been there to provide alternatives.

Iraq, on the other hand, never attacked us. In fact, we have now learned that our sanctions against Iraq had done their work in essentially eliminating Iraq’s capacity for weapons of mass destruction. By attacking Iraq, we increased the perception of our antagonism toward Muslim nations, and we increased poverty — both direct and powerful factors in inciting the terrorist actions we seek to end. And we damage our case for the morality of our cause. Again, we veer from our founding principles: Lincoln wrote “If, today, (anyone) should choose to say he thinks it’s necessary to invade Canada to prevent the British from invading us ... you may say to him, ‘I see no probability of the British invading us.’ But he will say to you, ‘Be silent; I see it, (even) if you don’t.’” Generals Lee and Grant both struggled with their conscience regarding the U.S. invasion of Mexico in 1847, which they both fought

in but thought to be an egregious war and a stain on the honor of the U.S.<sup>5</sup> The only war that a democratic society can ultimately conduct is a true war of self-defense, not a preemptive war under the guise of self-defense.<sup>6</sup>

## **Thoughtful Objections ... and Reasoned Answers**

Thoughtful friends have raised two important objections to our thesis. One of these is that not attacking the insurgents is tantamount to appeasing thugs, and appeasement is a mistake. We will leave alone for the moment the question of whether Allawi is the right man and someone else is not. Our foreign policy history is filled with examples of the U.S. supporting the wrong person — we have supported Hussein, Chalabi, Marcos, Ky, and the list goes on. Nevertheless, the argument is that, if we leave, we will be repeating the famous mistake of Neville Chamberlain when he acquiesced to Hitler in the interest of short-term peace. We would argue that this is not a relevant comparison. Germany's economic and military strength were at relative parity with the economies and military strength of England or France. In stark contrast, the U.S. economy dwarfs that of Iraq, being more than 100 times larger; our advantage in military size and technology is such that we would win the military aspect of any war in which we were participants, including Iraq, if only we were willing to fight unthrottled. Never before in history has the military of one country dominated in such an overwhelming way — not Rome in the days of the Caesars, not Britain at the height of the empire — no one. Our strength and dominance mean we can achieve our goals through economic means and other types of influence, as we so successfully did in eliminating weapons of mass destruction from Iraq. Therefore, "appeasement" is not a risk. Neglecting to track down true terrorists is a risk. Neglecting to track down nuclear weapons is a risk. Reducing our profile in an Iraqi civil war is almost certainly not.

The second objection our friends have raised is with our thesis that poverty and hyperchange are the catalysts of terrorism, and that exercising our formidable military strength is not the best or only solution to these problems. As example, they cite liberal mayors in the 1960s and 1970s explaining rising crime as a byproduct of poverty, broken schools and urban despair, while subsequent mayors in more recent decades empowered the police to aggressively enforce the law, during which time there was indeed a decrease in violent crime. To this we answer that when you examine crime statistics nationwide (e.g., murders per 1,000 population, etc.) from the 1960s to the present, the trends from state to state and region to region have been similar, regardless of whether their respective administrations were conservative or liberal. While police efforts can influence trends at the margin, some other force beyond police force — careful analysis suggests some demographic or societal force<sup>7</sup> — was responsible. In very much the same sense, military action in the Middle East cannot solve any of the root causes of the problems there. Ultimately, force does not subdue, it enrages. It reinforces and exacerbates the sense of hopelessness among those that feel helpless, attacked and aggrieved.

## **Changing the Course of History ... by Reclaiming the Course of History**

Because we have not looked to history and human nature, we have misdiagnosed the causes of the world's current epidemic of terrorism. Rather, we have done the very things that exacerbate the causes and thus increase world terrorism. We need to acknowledge this ... and change our course. We need to do those things that truly will reduce terrorism. And equally important, we need to reexamine who we are as a nation.

In the wake of 9/11, it was appropriate to be concerned and to build defenses and protection that we had not previously contemplated. But it is not appropriate that this defensiveness should become paranoia and result in a decline in the treasured civil liberties that define our nation. We should encourage prudence but not fear — and we should remember that fear-mongering is the province of cowards. As Ben Franklin said, those who would "give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety." We should remember that we are built on a foundation of

uncensored freedom and our vision of ourselves as a beacon on a hill implies love and respect and friendship more than it implies power.

Reversing our approach is not merely about redeeming our heritage; it will have an enormous salutary effect on tangible matters such as interest rates and oil prices. The billions spent fighting in Iraq can be spent on true anti-terrorist actions ... or deficit reduction ... or cancer research. (We marked the anniversary of 1,000 dead in Iraq, while tens of thousands fall to cancer each year.) We can use this money to support our educational system, to stimulate employment at home or to fight with renewed resources those other wars that we have not yet shown an ability to win — such as the war on our own domestic poverty, or the war on drugs.

We have erred in attacking Iraq. The replacement regime that we instate will almost certainly be an oppressive regime. There has been an unacceptable loss in lives and an incalculable effect that has engendered hatred and increased terrorism around the world. That is not our America. Our America is a bold and vigorous country, whose achievements continue to surpass those of any nation before us, and that at its heart values love, friendship, respect and decency for the entire world. Our true history is one of recognizing our mistakes and emerging stronger, bolder and yet with an extra measure of humility and wisdom.

No matter which candidate earns our nation's vote this November, we would entreat both to hear our call for a new vision and new policies to address the recurring rise of terrorism. Please share this article and help open the discussion to these ideas. Make copies of this page or visit our website at [www.americanrespect.com](http://www.americanrespect.com) to forward it electronically to your family, friends, colleagues and contacts. Encourage them to spread the word as well. There's no charge for downloading this article, and we are neither a PAC nor an organization asking for contributions to advance a cause or candidate. And please send your reactions and responses to us at [comments@americanrespect.com](mailto:comments@americanrespect.com).

**Let us all take this critical time in history to reexamine where we are ... and who we are ... and what we really need to do.**

**Grasp with us again the American mantle of love, respect, friendship and freedom that has long served as a beacon to the world.**

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#### Footnotes

1. Careful historians, including Barbara Tuchman, James Burke and Karen Armstrong, have argued that factors as disparate as high crime rates and fundamentalist revivals are evidence of, and a reaction to, hyperchange within a given historical period or society.
2. Karen Armstrong's *Battle for God* is a powerful exegesis of this theme as it relates to the Middle East.
3. Historian Jay Winik, in his book *April 1865*.
4. *Ibid*
5. *Washington Post*.
6. *Personal Memoirs: Ulysses S. Grant* (written with the help of Mark Twain, as Grant was dying).
7. Read more in Barbara Tuchman's thesis, *Practicing History & Selected Essays*.
8. The best analyses that we have seen show a close correlation between the decrease in violent crime to the decline in the population of older teenage and young adult males as a percent of the total U.S. population.