

American Respect Part II: *From Attitudes to Actions -- Addressing the “how to” of a more appropriate and effective response to global terrorism.*

Since we first published our essay, “Our Current Policies Increase Terrorism,” in the *New York Times* on 9/26/04 (see www.americanrespect.com), the election has come and gone, and we continue to bring the war to cities and villages within Iraq. Our simple thesis – that waging war in Iraq is increasing terrorism – remains a minority view. However, we maintain that view is what our nation must come to understand, and we would note that:

- Tens of thousands of Iraqis are dead – men, women and children
- Over 1200 Americans are dead and over 25,000 are wounded.
- Large numbers of European Muslims are emigrating to Iraq to join what is increasingly perceived as the “holy” wars against the U.S. – as would be predicted by our thesis.
- Oil prices are much higher than before the war; interest rates continue to rise; The dollar is declining rapidly in value versus other key world currencies; the Producers Price Index has reached a 14-year high; and gold is at a 16-year high -- in large measure due to the war and the \$100 billion per year being spent on it.
- We have “taken” Falluja and certain other areas, but it is of minimal consequence because the forces we are fighting are not tied to geography (a lesson we should have learned in Vietnam). Furthermore, the physical destruction we are wreaking will make Iraq’s economic recovery much more difficult.
- Neither holding the Iraqi elections nor postponing them will change the adverse consequences of our presence and our policies.
- We are conducting these actions with a shortage of trained and willing troops to adequately address current goals in Iraq, a tragic disservice to the young men and women already nobly serving our country.

Furthermore, the word “terrorist” is increasingly being used as a catch-all phrase for evil, the way “communist” became a catch-all phrase for evil in prior decades. Simply call someone a “terrorist” or “terrorist sympathizer”, and you’ve fully made your case—no facts or intellectual rigor required. We are reminded of politicians in the 50’s and 60’s that enhanced their careers by invoking a communist threat beyond any communist reality, when we were all ultimately to learn that the communist threat never extended beyond the certain rulers and the people that were their apparatus—and the vast majority of people in the affected regions were ordinary people with love and hope and aspirations like ourselves. We must be careful not to misapply this term, or apply it more broadly than is justified or true. Do we remember the fear and hatred with which Soviet Olympic athletes were regarded?

Since our first essay, we have been asked by many people to elaborate and expand on HOW we can reduce terrorism. Here is our attempt to do that and also to add modestly to the explanation of WHY as well:

(For those who continue to wonder about the composition and disposition of the American Respect group, please note that we are primarily Caucasian, Christian, supportive of Israel, suburban-bred, ordinary Americans. But our group is deeply concerned by the harm currently being brought by reactionaries and extremists on both sides of the divide. And even more importantly, our group is delighted by the wonders of the world we live in, and the gifts that diverse cultures bring us all in art, literature, music, romance, cuisine, science, religion, products and so many other areas.)

WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF TERRORISM

One reason a so-called “war on terror” cannot be successful using traditional military strategies is because there is no single “nation-state” from which our opponents arise. There is no capital city to bomb, no single host country to invade. Find them in one place, and they will move; depose one leader and another will rise from their ranks. Whether or not deposing Saddam Hussein was

a noble mission, Iraq had little or nothing to do with the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S. ... and while we have argued that this war increases terrorism, it is equally true that no aspect of this war will reduce terrorism, since terrorists are tied by their common enemy, and by ideology, tactics and cyberspace -- not by a single nation-state.

As we have discussed, **terrorism is the only resort that the very material poor or weak have to fight the perceived oppression of the militarily superior.** Their grievances are their perception of disproportionate support of Israel by the west, and their exclusion from participation and self-expression in the societies on the boundaries of the Islamic crescent – from Bosnia Herzegovina to Chechnya to Kashmir and India to Israel.

These two areas of grievances are both exacerbated and fuelled by rapid population growth, rapid modernization and extreme poverty. (Many have pointed out that Osama bin Laden and other terrorist leaders are wealthy; but their following would not be a fraction as large as it is if not for their ability to recruit from among the destitute and despairing – just as a young Adolph Hitler would not have been able to create a national movement if not for the hyperinflation, depression and sharp blows to national esteem that dominated the German experience in the 1920's and 30's).

Terrorists, from their position of weakness, cannot hope, and do not even strive, to govern, but instead aim to destabilize governments. From their perceived positions of righteousness, their righteous ends justify any means, and they get what resources they can from drug cartels and other criminal elements. And make no mistake, **terrorism has existed for millennia as a function of non-Islamic causes and religions**, and exists throughout the world today as a function of non-Islamic causes and religions, **and thus Islam cannot of itself, be the cause or take the blame for terrorism.**

WE MUST DEPOLARIZE HOT SPOTS

In assessing how to genuinely reduce terrorism, we must acknowledge that the terrible and unresolved situations in Kashmir, Chechnya, Israel and elsewhere are *causal factors* in the rise of terrorism. No actions can make much difference until there is a marked reduction in the tension in these areas. These continuing conflicts are due in part to the perception of U.S. favoritism toward Israel at the expense of Muslim interests.

Certainly we believe strongly in Israel's right to exist and to defend itself, and would not advocate any diminution in our support of Israel. Instead, we suggest an increase in support and munificence toward predominantly Muslim nations, and the use of our friendship, intelligence and influence to bring about a marked decrease in the conflict and tensions in Israel, in Kashmir and in Chechnya. We don't pretend to have all the answers, but we believe that there are a range of acceptable solutions and that **the U.S. is currently not using impartial influence with nearly the energy, priority and effectiveness that it could.** A recent statement by Pervez Musharraf is representative: "All (Muslim) terrorist and militant activity in the world today has been initiated by the Palestinian problem. Who do you think is carrying out the suicide attacks? This is because of the sense of hopelessness, alienation and powerlessness."

WE MUST OPEN GLOBAL TRADE

We must also step back from Iraq, Afghanistan and the Israeli/Palestinian question to view the full geographic scope of the issue. Predominantly Islamic nations range from such Saharan countries as Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Egypt and Sudan; to such quasi-European countries as Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina; to Middle Eastern countries such as Syria, Lebanon, Qatar, Yemen and Oman; and to such Asian regions and countries as Chechnya, Pakistan and Indonesia (which has the largest Muslim population of any country), and many more beyond these. **The solution to the level of terrorism in each of the countries is increased stability -- as measured by a more limited and representative government; and increased prosperity**

-- as measured by the effective distribution of wealth and the resulting increased size of the middle class. Importantly, increased stability and prosperity in any one of these countries benefits the entire equation.

We believe that a comprehensive, active program of opening and encouraging trade, tourism, cultural exchange efforts and the like between ourselves and any or all of these countries will be directly and indirectly beneficial in reducing terrorism. As we have said, history emphatically demonstrates that specialization and trade are the agents of prosperity. When an American or Brit buys a Persian rug, Turkish spices or Pakistani goods, and when a citizen of Qatar buys U.S.-made laundry detergent or agricultural equipment, our mutual prosperity and stability increases. And every person in these countries who sells something to an American or European, or sees one of their neighbors benefit from doing the same, is less likely to become a terrorist or support terrorism. If citizens of Iraq can see increases in stability and prosperity in Turkey or Morocco or Qatar or Kashmir, hope increases. And while financial aid can often be important, **trade is more powerful and sustainable than aid.** Trade costs little or nothing and creates economic benefit to both sides involved in the trading.

As an example, there has been a tremendous desire on the part of Turkey to gain entry into the European Union. This fits directly into our thesis. It would bring increased prosperity and interdependence between nations with different religious heritages. And yet Turkey is having great difficulty in gaining this entry. Without commenting on or debating the specific issues associated with their potential entrance, having Turkey in the EU would have a long-term beneficial effect in reducing terrorism. And we would argue that any assistance the U.S. can provide in bringing these two sides together would be of more value than even the most optimistic assessment of the benefit of the war in Iraq.

Thoughtful friends have applauded this view of trading, but have simultaneously expressed doubt that open trade could make much difference because 1) it is hard to devise initiatives of sufficient scope and 2) it tends to enrich the power elite, thus creating added frustration among ordinary citizens as their participation and self-expression is delayed. We recognize that the possibility for such undesired outcome is great, and ought be strongly guarded against. However, we also remember that trading was the indispensable predicate to every burst of prosperity in history, from the Phoenicians to the Italian Renaissance and to the establishment of the new world in the Americas, though we fully acknowledge that beneficial effect can take decades. Historically, broadening the class of the economically successful has always been gradual, whether from the king to the lords and barons, or from the Astors, Carnegies and Morgans to a broader group beyond them.

WE MUST BUILD STRONGER INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCES

A stronger international coalition is not just about trade, nor just about good will and diplomacy, nor even simply about building joint forces of "peacekeeping" troops to monitor potential trouble spots. Rather, **a unified international community has greater potential to stifle such trouble spots before they erupt, particularly if that coalition of allies includes representation from nations in Asia and the Arab world.**

Another important result of creating stronger relationships with a broader group of allies would be its resulting impact on our ability to **enforce international laws that are already in place and to eliminate the weapons of terrorism.** Working together with our allies, we can dig into the connections of these international criminals, drug lords, terrorists and arms dealers to shut down their financial resources. We can ask ally governments to watch their banks for potential money-laundering activities (perhaps at the risk of their losing access to U.S. trade and/or aid). We can combine our respective resources and technologies to trace terrorist movements, seize bank accounts and yes, when necessary, carry out targeted military strikes, preferably without committing ground troops, as was successfully avoided in Kosovo.

In contrast to these ideas and suggestions, note that even the minimal efforts announced and budgeted by the current administration for "winning the hearts and minds" of people in the Middle East and Muslim countries have gone neglected. There are ample loud cries and complaints from within the State Department and the US Military regarding the neglect of these initiatives.

WE MUST ENGAGE DIRECTLY AND RESPECTFULLY WITH THE ISLAMIC WORLD

Islam is not our enemy. We currently enjoy positive diplomatic relations with Jordan and Egypt and Morocco and other predominantly Islamic nations, even though they are not democracies in the American sense of the word. **Gaining their perspectives in addressing our shared challenges can only benefit our shared objectives of peace and prosperity.** Where applicable, the U.S. can choose to exercise its considerable capacity for economic aid to help nurture the process by which a nation's citizens create their own versions of open and representative society. **We've proven many times over that democracy cannot be imposed at gunpoint.**

Certainly we recognize that **despots and dictators in some of these countries are a monumental obstacle to stability and prosperity** in the area, and in many respects a causal factor in terrorism. And it is also clear that **the US has inappropriately supported many of these regimes in the interest of access to oil.** Added to this, history has shown that countries with disproportionately large amounts of natural resources, such as certain oil-rich Middle East countries, have the poorest track record in terms of overall progress in stability and prosperity -- the theory being that the inevitable struggle to obtain and control those national resources acts to crowd out economic diversification and development and preclude the distribution of power.

Nevertheless, we must also recognize that **the transition from despots and dictators (or kings) in Western Europe to a more limited government with greater representation took hundreds of years** and was marked by civil war and bloodshed. Some of the most prominent events in western history marked this tumultuous process -- the Magna Carta, the Glorious Revolution, the French Revolution, the American Revolution, and many more. Distribution of power was a slow and uneven evolution from a concentration of power only in the king, to some type of balance between the king and powerful nobles, to the incorporation of other powerful entities such as cities or guilds into the balance of power, and then to a more formal distribution of representatives, which included incorporation of a voting mechanism to select some or most of these representatives.

To those who would argue that the civilizations of the Middle East and Asia are much older and thus should have similarly evolved by now, we would respond that many of the countries were created as recently as the aftermath of World War I, and even those that have been around longer have been exposed to the industrial and information revolutions for a far briefer period than the west.

Furthermore, we should remember that the most central ideas in the creation of the United States were 1) government limited by *law*, 2) guaranteed *legal* rights to individuals (our Bill of Rights), 3) more *representative* governance, and 4) the limitation of the power of the government by separation of powers and the resulting checks and balances. These were as much or more the objectives of the US Constitution than the idea of one-person, one-vote democracy, which was partially muted in our constitution by such devices as the Electoral College. **We should therefore not consider it inherently inadequate if the governments of certain of these countries make progress toward stability and prosperity by taking real steps toward these four principles—without necessarily achieving a complete democracy overnight.** Simply look at the struggles that Mexico has had on this path during the past century.

WEALTH OPPORTUNITIES MUST BE MORE BROADLY AVAILABLE

In addition to these changes in the form of government, economic restructuring is required. We believe that foreign aid and welfare have proven to be limited in their effect, and difficult to sustain. In contrast, one of the most potent ideas we have ever come across in this quest to distribute wealth in developing countries comes from a book by Hernando de Soto called *"The Other Path: The Economic Answer To Terrorism."*

This is a powerful and powerfully researched analysis of how countries, including and especially the United States, have distributed land as an engine to wealth creation for the masses, and describes how these same methods can be enacted in economically-disadvantaged countries today. To understand de Soto's thesis, think of the distribution by fiat of Oklahoma land in 1896 (the "sooners") or the de-facto land distribution to squatters on the western edge of the original 13 colonies, or to miners in gold-rush era California, which, though viewed disreputably during their time (including by our all-time favorite founding father George Washington), can be demonstrated to have been one of the most important predicates of broad wealth distribution in our country's history, and the historical underpinning of today's middle class.

WE MUST REDUCE OUR PROFILE IN IRAQ

We must reiterate the importance of reducing our profile in Iraq to reducing global terrorism. **Our presence, and the death and destruction it has brought, has increased the vitriol with which we are perceived and provided further fuel for recruiting new terrorists.** There are a variety of useful suggestions on how to reduce the U.S. profile in Iraq that do not necessarily include the withdrawal of troops. Transforming our mission to one of peacekeeping and protection through their elections and perhaps some defined (and not too lengthy) period afterwards, instead of our current mission of attacking the insurgents, would be a good place to start.

Still, we recommend removal of troops, because we believe troop removal will inevitably be implemented at a point prior to the achievement of stability anyway – because stability is likely not achievable with our presence, and the patience of the American people for continuing to have troops there will inevitably and appropriately ebb. The only probable alternative, as we have said, is to have the Iraqi government take a repressive posture not dissimilar to Syria, Egypt or the Iraq of Hussein.

Our actions in Iraq – from an unsanctioned war based on WMD that we never found, to the prisoner abuse in Abu Ghraib – have increased the perception among many Muslims, even those who do not endorse terrorist acts, and even among many of our Western allies, that America is morally corrupt and economically exploitative. While decidedly untrue, it is a perception that indirectly makes heroes of suicide bombers and martyrs of captured terrorist leaders. When we then "declare war" on terror and deliver a purely military response, we elevate a criminal enterprise to a missionary stature that only serves to attract more recruits and donations to their cause. Recent developments within the known terrorist community corroborate this point. According to U.S. security analysts, counter-terrorism experts and Middle East scholars, there is a marked shift in focus among terrorists toward Iraq as a staging ground for their battle. Terrorists from throughout Europe and Asia are flocking to Iraq to support the insurgents. It's been noted that even the Pakistani Sunni extremist group Lashkar-e-Tayba is shifting its sights from Kashmir to Iraq. Disturbing too is the rise of a new Shiite militancy that shares the apocalyptic views of Al Qaeda. **We are being forced into a choice: Either decimate the country and thousands if not hundreds of thousands, of innocents, or remove ourselves and redirect our energy and resources to addressing the cause and spread of terrorism, rather than its symptomatic outbreaks.**

So our four-step plan for reducing terrorism remains as described in our original essay:

- 1) **Intelligently pursue true terrorists such as al Qaeda – and rebuild international coalitions to help achieve this.**
- 2) **Energetically pursue balanced solutions in Palestine, Kashmir, and Chechnya, with these rebuilt international coalitions**
- 3) **Increase trade with Muslim countries and, as part of this, influence their governments toward being limited by law and having increasingly broadly representative governments**
- 4) **Decrease our profile in Iraq.**

WE MUST UNDERSTAND CURRENT POPULATION TRENDS

We must add a further item for consideration to this discussion. **A pronounced shift is underway in ethnic representation across the planet, and it is changing our world in ways most people have not yet recognized.** The “Muslim-centric” and “Hindu-centric” populations are growing at an annual rate of 2-3%, while the growth of “Christian-centric” and “Buddhist centric” populations are growing at much slower rates, if at all.

This dramatic growth of the Muslim population worldwide is creating conflict in every geographic area in which people of this faith co-exist with people of other established faiths. It is leading to Hindu-Muslim “riots” within India. It is behind the perceived threat of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan. It underlies the genocide(s) in Serbo-Croatia. Indeed, India, Yugoslavia and Israel are flash points only because they are the frontier-towns where the Islamic Crescent meets other faiths—namely Hinduism, Christianity, and Judaism.

America has been drawn into this conflict because it is perceived as supporting regimes and forces that are preventing people of this “nascent” faith from finding self-expression, including the Jewish state in Israel, and the Christians in Yugoslavia. Adding to this is the perception that we have not facilitated a solution in Kashmir, and we have backed many of the monarchies in the Middle East that refuse to give democratic representation to the Islamic masses

Military power has never been able to reverse the shifts unleashed by such population trends. Examples include the military actions of the proponents of apartheid in South Africa, where the black population was growing at 3.5% per year while the white population wasn’t growing, or of the ancient Romans against the more procreative Goths and Huns. In today’s Israel, the Palestinian population is growing at 3%, and the Israeli population is not.

And while a major part of our thesis has been that poverty is always an issue with such nascent populations, some view the bigger problem as being their lack of means for participation and self-expression. As just one note in this regard, we include this anecdote from a highly successful, Indian-born American friend of ours. “I grew up in a Hindu-Muslim “hot-spot” ... my hometown is utterly sacred to Hindus (the local majority when I was a kid) since it has one of only three Brahma temples in the world, and it is second only to Mecca for Muslims. The Muslim minority was ridiculed at school because they were circumcised, rejected by employers because of their desire to pray during work hours, and unable to get their voice heard or their situation corrected because they could never get their leaders elected to influential offices.”

It is a story as old as civilization, and as new as our own civil rights movement in America. **Balanced representation of majority/minority interests is a moral and practical imperative** and ought not be a numbers game, but when a major shift is in progress, conflicts will escalate unless fair mediation is sought and/or until – through the unpleasant course of many generations -- it becomes a “non-issue” when the minority has grown to supplant the majority.

The tactical response for America, then, must be to quietly assist this growing population in its quest for self-expression. In addition to the many moves we have outlined, it will require breaking glass and retrenching from some long-held stances in US foreign policy. It will require

revisiting the support we continue to give to certain despotic monarchies. It will require revisiting the policies we've had in the Indian sub-continent for over 40 years—which has, in many important respects, led to the growth of many of the terrorist groups that attack us today. (Note that, in a similar context, the U.S. funded and supported both Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden when it suited our anti-Soviet interests.)

THE WISDOM OF OUR FATHERS

In our Declaration of Independence, drafted by a committee comprised of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, we collectively declare that “all men are created equal”. Our actions and presumptions about others should not betray this belief. The suggestions we make here are grounded in our belief that **people everywhere have similar hopes, desires and needs—a need for family and love, a need for their lives to have meaning, a need for comfort and sustenance. Over the long term, no people can be precluded from fulfilling these needs.** As we stated in our original essay, there has never been a more important time to recall the wisdom of our forefathers who inspired a nation and created a beacon for the world with messages of love, forgiveness, humility and healing. We remember Lincoln’s admonishment in his second inaugural address, “**with malice toward none, with charity for all**” ... and Washington in his farewell address to Congress, “**Observe good faith and justice toward all nations. Cultivate peace and harmony with all.**” We would ask again, are these not still the values by which we wish to be judged and represented in the world arena? Ultimately, force does not subdue, it enrages. Friendship, respect and love are far more powerful than force and vengeance will ever be; and they require an active acknowledgement that as citizens of the world, all men (and women) are created equal, walking arm-in-arm with allies and presumed adversaries to seek common ground. That is our America, the America of our founding fathers, and the America of generations yet to come.

Among our next steps, American Respect is hoping to create a higher profile group of historians, academics, international economic and policy experts and other qualified citizens who share our views to form a sort of defacto “speakers bureau” and “interview bureau” to continue to disseminate these ideas. We are considering sponsoring or conducting a conference on “*Ending the War in Iraq: Diverse and Critical Perspectives from Academics, Journalists, Diplomats and the Military*”. If you have any suggestions for people we should approach in that regard, please let us know. Meanwhile, we encourage you to forward this follow-up essay to friends and neighbors and keep the discussion going. Your thoughts and ideas are always welcome, and we will continue to post selected comments, both supportive and critical, at our website, www.americanrespect.com

Thank you for your continued interest.