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Conservative Principles, Political Reality, and the War on Terrorism

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For 10 years, between 1991 and September 11, 2001, Islamic extremists carefully constructed a worldwide, clandestine organization of terror cells built to attack Western liberal society in general and the United States in particular. This secret army included operational cells with the mission of killing and destroying property, a financial support network, and an established command and control structure. Its existence was detected by the United States and other Western nations, but it was left to function essentially unchecked, although an American cruise missile or two punctuated its operation.

The strength of the reaction by President George W. Bush after September 11, 2001, was to recognize that this was not a simple criminal act. We had been attacked, and to declare war on the attackers and the nations that gave this global, non-state actor safe haven was the appropriate response.

Al-Qaeda's War on the United States

War had been declared on the United States by al-Qaeda when we left our forces in the Middle East after the first Gulf War in 1991, but we neither knew it nor reacted to it. Throwing back an invasion from Iraq and restoring the borders of Kuwait was a just mission—one that required a considerable buildup of military forces in Saudi Arabia.

Maintaining the cease-fire with Iraq at the end of the 1991 Gulf War fell on the United States and a few of its coalition partners, primarily England and Australia. The forces that stayed behind in the Persian

Talking Points

- After the 1991 Gulf War, Islamic extremists attacked the World Trade Center in New York in 1993, the American Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, and the USS *Cole* in Yemen on October 12, 2000. But American leaders treated each of these attacks as though it was a violation of law instead of an act of war.
- President Bush got it right on September 12, 2001, by declaring war on this global, non-state terrorist organization. The Administration realized that the sovereign state had to confront the globalized, transnational terrorists and manage that confrontation in a world of states, laws, and international institutions such as the United Nations.
- As Americans, we are not at war with a particular religion, and we remain tolerant. But a branch of Islam, its most extremist group, has declared war on us. This is a situation where one cannot be neutral and simply sit on the sidelines.

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Gulf—about 5,000 in Saudi Arabia and an aircraft carrier battle group in the vicinity—ensured that United Nations weapons inspectors could operate without interference by Saddam Hussein.

These forces served another critical mission: They prevented genocide in Iraq by maintaining no-fly zones in which Saddam's forces could not attack either the Shiites in the south of Iraq or the Kurds in the north.

Maintaining those forces in the heartland of the Islamic faith created a deep hatred in extremist Islamic groups, who hated free enterprise, free worship, Western prosperity and civil society. These Islamic extremists attacked the United States where they could: at the World Trade Center in New York in 1993, at the American Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, and by hitting the USS *Cole* in Yemen on October 12, 2000.

But American leaders treated each of these attacks as though it was a single crime, a violation of law instead of an act of war. No comprehensive military action was taken until President Bush "connected the dots."

The U.S. Response: Getting It Right

President Bush got it right on September 12, 2001, by declaring war on this global, non-state terrorist organization. In doing so, the Bush Administration also realized that, just as corporations had to wrestle with the phenomenon of globalization, which challenged established notions of how nations and trade laws interact in the world system, the sovereign state had to confront the globalized, transnational terrorists and manage that confrontation in a world of states, laws, and international institutions such as the United Nations.

In Afghanistan, a multinational coalition joined the United States to request that a sovereign state, Afghanistan, deliver up the terrorist organization with which we were at war and stop providing it bases and safe haven. And when the Taliban government there refused, the United States and its allies attacked. Explained in military terms, this was one campaign in the global war on terrorism.

To continue to use that military terminology, other campaigns were clearly necessary in Southeast Asia,

Iraq, and East Asia. A military, diplomatic, financial, and political campaign was required to ensure that no weapons that can produce mass casualties got into the hands of these al-Qaeda terrorists.

Thus, the major exporters of weapons of mass destruction were targets of special scrutiny: Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. Other countries—Syria, Libya, and even China—were approached through diplomatic channels to change their behavior. In that sense, the coalition attack on Iraq in March 2003 must be viewed as a major branch and sequel of the general war on terrorism and the campaign against terrorists and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Let's step back and put this into a more familiar context. Imagine your home and family, living peacefully on a cul-de-sac, surrounded by neighbors. You form a block association to discuss things like trash pickup, the hours when the kids can play ball on the street, and some general rules for the conduct of life.

One neighbor takes an intense dislike to you and your family, perhaps because of the religion you practice. Your lives are threatened. All the neighbors hear it, and you discuss with them your intent to react. But the neighbors disagree. They don't get any threats, they say; they have no cause to think the neighbor will harm them, and they disagree with any action you propose.

Then actions are taken: Your car is damaged, your child is accosted, and finally you go to the neighborhood association to ask for action against the offending neighbor. Again you are told no action is appropriate; you must seek a way to make the offending neighbor feel better about himself. And—you guessed it—eventually you realize that you must defend yourself, with or without assistance from some of your neighbors, and regardless of whether the neighbors agree with your belief that you are threatened. You must act.

This is essentially the position in which the United States found itself with Iraq. Despite an unprecedented, long, multilateral diplomatic effort in the United Nations, the United States had to form its own international coalition and go after Iraq with those security partners. Iraq had violated

the 1991 cease-fire, kicked out weapons inspectors, consistently attempted to shoot down American and coalition aircraft, lied in its response to the U.N., and ignored 17 U.N. resolutions.

Importance of the Nation-State

I have painted a picture of a major shift in the way the international system works, from actions by sovereign states to actions by global organizations without a fixed nation or base of operations.

For almost four centuries, since the Treaty of Westphalia on October 24, 1648, the full territorial sovereignty of the member states of the established Western world order has empowered them to contract treaties with one another and with foreign powers. By this and other changes, the princes of the Holy Roman Empire became absolute sovereigns in their own dominions. The Holy Roman Emperor and the Diet were left with a mere shadow of their former power. A world-governing organization lost its power. The treaty was recognized as a fundamental law of the German constitution and formed the basis of all subsequent treaties until the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806.

In the international system, up to today, the major actor has been the sovereign state, at times acting by itself, at times acting in concert with allies. It is only recently that we have had to confront globalized economic and political forces that began to behave like states, such as al-Qaeda.

In a recent speech to the Foreign Policy Research Institute, former Secretary of State George Shultz reminded us that in reacting to international terrorism, "first and foremost, we must shore up the state system." "The world has worked for three centuries with the sovereign state as the basic operating entity," he said. "States are accountable to citizens and responsible for the well-being of their citizens. And states create international organizations to serve their needs, not as means to govern them."

George Shultz's words are an important reminder of the importance of the sovereign state as an actor in international relations for conservatives. To contrast between liberal and conservative

approaches to policy, in domestic affairs, liberals tend to search for solutions that reinforce the primacy of the federal government rather than the individual or community for resolving difficulties, trusting the government to look out for the people and solve problems.

In international affairs, the liberal approach tends to be similar, trusting in international regimes and "world-governing organizations" over diplomacy between sovereign states looking out for their own interests to manage world affairs. Conservatives are generally driven by national interests to act for themselves or in concert with other sovereign states.

This is not to say that international institutions are of no value. While the international system may be eroding, there are organizations that are of great value. Imagine fighting the SARS epidemic or other infectious diseases without the World Health Organization. And imagine safe international airline flight without the coordinating action of the International Civil Aviation Organization.

But the United Nations has not proven to be particularly effective in managing international security issues, particularly when large amounts of money are involved. The U.N.'s Oil-for-Food program is turning out to be a scandal involving billions of dollars and a global network of bribes involving Saddam Hussein, high government officials in Europe, and perhaps even U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan.

And it is a system that essentially ignores the bounds of morality where each state, regardless of the character of its government or leaders, has a vote with the same weight on policy. Remember that the head of the United Nations Disarmament Organization would have been Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and the head of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights is Libya.

Finally, remember that, despite returning to the United Nations repeatedly to get action on the flouting of 17 United Nations resolutions by Saddam Hussein, and Saddam's willful violations of the armistice he agreed to in 1991, the Security Council did not agree to enforce its own authority.

Comparing Afghanistan and Iraq

Let's turn to Afghanistan and Iraq for a few minutes. The battle against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan was an "economy of force" operation. That is, given the nature of the geography in which we had to fight, the political considerations in the fight, and the enemy we faced, it was neither effective nor useful to throw a large number of troops into the battle. The battle was best managed with a small number of carefully selected forces fighting with local allies.

The global war on terrorism is a lot like Afghanistan in the sense of the forces that can be used on the task. The forces against which we are fighting are amorphous and distributed. The fight requires economic, political, and military action coordinated with law enforcement organizations and carefully gathered and vetted intelligence. Only about 10,000 troops were required to dislodge the Taliban and al-Qaeda, and if one tried to send hundreds of thousands of troops to attack terrorists around the world, they wouldn't find their quarry.

I see Iraq as a different type of military operation—a classical military campaign involving maneuver forces. Our armed forces performed brilliantly there, but I have serious reservations about the way that battle was framed for them. I believe that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and the political leadership in the Department of Defense constrained what would have been the normal selection of forces for the attack, and their phasing and flow into battle, in order to make a political point about the way that the U.S. military should be transformed for the future.

Our troops did a marvelous job in Iraq, and American equipment and doctrine performed superbly. However, it is clear that more forces and a different mix of forces were needed at the beginning, and many of our problems in Iraq flow from the initial decisions that were made.

- The lines of communication, or supply lines, needed better screening in the early days of combat.
- More armored cavalry in the initial assault attack would have helped there.

- The pace of the war would have been faster had the Fourth Infantry Division been committed earlier instead of holding out in hopes that Turkey would allow them to approach Iraq from the north.
- And many arms caches and nuclear and weapons depots were left unsecured. More armor, military police, or mechanized forces in the initial attack would have helped address that problem.

I doubt very much that, left to their own devices, our military war planners would have opted for the force configuration and flow that they used.

I also believe our intelligence on Iraq was poor. The CIA got far more wrong than they did right. U.S. intelligence failed to know the facts about weapons of mass destruction, failed to know the extent to which the basic electrical and water infrastructure had degraded, failed to gauge the reaction of the different religious factions in Iraq to the occupation, and failed to target and kill Saddam Hussein and his family in the initial precision strike that started the war. Hopefully, the new Director of Central Intelligence will be able to vigorously reform the intelligence process.

All that said, I believe that the attack on Iraq was a just war, fought for just reasons, and represents a branch and sequel in the global war on terrorism that needed to be fought. When it is over, American forces no longer need to be anchored in large numbers in Turkey and Saudi Arabia, flying operations over Iraq.

Ultimately, however, there is only one practical answer to resolving the security situation, and that is to turn security over to the Iraqis, prepare them as well as we can for the difficult days ahead, and continue to provide moral and material support. Our goals must be a functioning state that does not aid terrorists, provide bases for terrorists, or work on or export weapons of mass destruction.

Conclusion

We are in for a long war. At home, we must remember that there are still clandestine cells of terrorists embedded in our society. Our homeland security system is vital to our protection.

And I believe it is important to keep in mind that Americans did not seek this war. We were attacked for what we are—a free nation—by a group that wants to curb that freedom and curtail our liberties.

As Americans, we are not at war with a particular religion, and we remain tolerant. But a branch of Islam, its most extremist group, has declared war on us. This is a situation where one cannot be neutral and simply sit on the sidelines. These extremists will come after us because of who we

are, and they detest our democratic ideals and religious freedoms.

Like the innocents who were murdered in the World Trade Center, at the Pentagon, or on United Airlines flight 93, we cannot opt out of this war. A strong offense is our best defense.

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