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## The Death of Neutrality: U.S. and European Convergence in Fighting the War on Terrorism

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European nations, Canada, and the United States have more in common than many suppose when it comes to dealing with the danger of international terrorism. We are closer to reaching something in this war akin to the Cold War consensus the West presented in the face of Soviet expansionism than many acknowledge. Additionally, the implications of reaching common ground on both sides of the Atlantic suggest what we all should be concerned about and the next steps that should be jointly taken in this long war.

North Americans and Europeans have more common cause in this long war than is widely assumed. We are headed toward common ground. There are three points that will form the core of the coming consensus on the long war against transnational terrorism. Much like the Cold War, we will agree on: (1) the nature of the war, (2) the state of the threat, and (3) the character of the response.

### A War By Any Name

There are two objections that are commonly raised against fighting a war on terrorism. One is senseless and ought to be dismissed out of hand. The other is a real concern and should be taken seriously—though denying the nature of the war will not resolve the issue.

The first complaint is that critics dismiss the notion that we should, or even could, be at war with terrorists. There is no universally agreed-upon definition of terrorism, they argue. Terrorism is a tactic, not an enemy. It is not a traditional war with states, armies, and objectives. Dealing with terrorists is a matter for law enforcement,

### Talking Points

- The war on terrorism, like the Cold War stand-off with the Soviets, is a real war—a competition between determined foes.
- A successful strategy for winning the war on terrorism includes providing security, promoting economic growth, strengthening civil society, and winning the war of ideas.
- The U.S. and Europe should support the Proliferation Security Initiative, promote information sharing, and take an “all-hazards approach” for preventing and responding to terrorist attacks.
- Such unified action requires consensus—a common view of the nature of the threat and the war, and a common vision of how to respond. The United States and Europe are closer to achieving this unity than the diatribes of pundits and politicians suggest.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
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diplomats, and social workers, they insist. These are baseless objections that have nothing to do with the key characteristic that defines a war: It is a competition between two determined foes for a political end that employs violence or the threat of violence.

The notion that “war” implies that the United States is intent on using only, or for that matter primarily, military instruments is completely groundless as well. After all, the United States and its NATO allies fought the Cold War using all the instruments of national power, including diplomatic, economic, intelligence, law enforcement, and—at times—military means. There were periods of direct armed conflict, such as the Korean War, but there were also decades of tense stand-off in which diplomats, spies, trade negotiators, and criminal investigators manned the trenches.

The fact that during the Cold War the West squared off against nation-states rather than ephemeral transnational groups is irrelevant as well. Wars are not, and have never been, solely the province of state-on-state competition. Wars, after all, existed long before the nation-state evolved. Wars are between enemies. It is that simple.

The terrorists believe they are at war with us. In fact, they see it as an act of cowardice that their enemies are afraid to acknowledge that fact. If their enemies refuse to wear the mantle of “warrior,” terrorists assume they are weak, lacking in honor, and spiritually inferior—and the notion that their enemy is vulnerable emboldens them. Failing to acknowledge we are at war only encourages the enemy to be more warlike.

The fact is we are at war. There are people trying to kill us, and we must stop them. After September 11, 2001, followed by Madrid, London, Baghdad, Bali and a host of foiled plots here and overseas, no one can seriously doubt this is a war by any name, which is why today hardly anyone seriously raises such nonsensical arguments.

A second objection is more troubling, and relevant. During wartime, states are expected to do what it takes to protect the nation. That can be a problem, because that enormous power and single-mindedness of purpose might be abused. It has been in the past. Long wars are especially problematic. As wars

lengthen and nations become more anxious to show progress, there is always a tendency to become a “garrison state,” more authoritarian, regimented, and unilateral. But the problem of states overreaching or abusing their powers cannot be solved by just denying that a state of war exists.

Simply eliminating the word “war” from our lexicon will not solve any of the significant differences in the trans-Atlantic relationship. Where European countries have disagreements with the United States, they have to address them forthrightly and not use a debate over terminology as a substitute for addressing substantive and difficult policy differences.

For example, arguing that a legitimate state of war does not exist, and therefore that the detention of prisoners at the U.S. facilities at Guantanamo Bay is unjustified, is a specious argument. It is an argument that has been used to mask the real issue about how to deal with unlawful combatants. The real issue is that it is a difficult problem. The United States acknowledges it is difficult and it has come up with the best answer to the problem it can. Branding the U.S. effort as illegitimate is unhelpful. If Europeans have suitable, feasible, and acceptable alternatives for dealing with detainees they should present them, not simply deny that the necessity to deal with problem exists.

The war on terrorism, like the Cold War stand-off with the Soviets, is a real war, a competition between determined foes, a conflict of action and counter-action fought with every weapon in the arsenal, including diplomatic and economic means, law enforcement and intelligence, and, where necessary, military forces. In practice, trans-Atlantic polices already acknowledge that fact.

## The State of the Threat

Experts on both sides of the Atlantic agree: The threat is changing. Transnational terrorist networks have suffered serious setbacks since 9/11—leaders captured, funding interrupted, and operations disrupted. The enemy’s response has been stepped-up recruitment and fundraising, particularly on the Internet; a shift to “softer” targets, inspiring disparate groups to launch attacks throughout Africa, Asia, and the Middle East; and most recently, a propaganda campaign waged through video tapes

delivered to Arab news networks. That is the state of al-Qaeda today.

What is less commonly appreciated is that al-Qaeda's strategy and all these post-9/11 developments reflect signs of weakness, not strength. Al-Qaeda, for example, went to Iraq because it could, because it was desperate to demonstrate that it could still strike back against the United States. Therefore, it did what any committed and resourceful enemy would do; it looked for the means to strike back. Iraq offered that opportunity. It is a large country with 25 million people, with porous borders, and rebuilding an entire new system of governance after 30 years of oppression and the violent ousting of Saddam Hussein's regime. Iraq just proves that global terrorism is a real problem that has to be addressed.

Transnational terrorism remains a serious problem despite the setbacks delivered to al-Qaeda because killing innocents is still relatively cheap. According to *The Economist*, 2000 euros (approximately \$2,600) can dispatch 20 terrorists to Iraq from neighboring Arab states.

Nevertheless, the results from al-Qaeda's perspective have to be disappointing.

They have failed to shake U.S. resolve. Before 9/11, Osama bin Laden declared that waning U.S. support for operations in Lebanon and Somalia after bloody setbacks "convinced us America is a paper tiger." Yet in Iraq, after years of fighting and casualties, they have failed to shake U.S. resolve. All they have proved in Iraq is that America and its allies are tough and determined enemies—an al-Qaeda failure.

Despite efforts to disrupt the political process, two free and fair national elections have been held and a sovereign government has been established. Despite efforts to inflame sectarian violence, even the most outrageous atrocities have not sparked a civil war—an al-Qaeda failure.

Attacks or attempted attacks in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Spain, and Britain have strengthened the resolve of Middle East and European states to combat transnational terrorism—an al-Qaeda failure.

A debate over strategy with "al-Qaeda in Iraq" has demonstrated the inability of bin Laden to control worldwide operations. In addition, the indiscriminate murder of Iraqis has even turned domestic insurgent groups against the "foreign fighters"—an al-Qaeda failure.

Al-Qaeda has no operational gains to show for its efforts, nor can it point to any real psychological victories. True, anti-America sentiment has taken up tick (as it did for that matter during many periods of the Cold War). That has not been matched, however, with an increasing rise in the popularity of al-Qaeda: It remains a fringe movement of terrorists.

In fact, it can be argued that bin Laden has taken his war to the airwaves via the sporadic videos released through the Arab media because he lacks the capacity to do much else. In addition, if al-Qaeda could mount another strike in the West, given the commitment that law enforcement and intelligence have demonstrated to combating these threats, the odds are that any network responsible for organizing and supporting an attack would be rolled up even more quickly and effectively than the 9/11 or Madrid bombing conspirators, leaving al-Qaeda even more crippled.

Nor do the number of terrorist attacks since 9/11 prove much about the nature of the threat. True, the number of attacks in recent years has risen. However, the numbers do not tell the whole story. Professor Audrey Cronin, a terrorism expert with the Congressional Research Service, noted that the number of international incidents during most of the 1990s was half that of the 1980s. Between 1996, when al-Qaeda got into the terrorism business, and 9/11, many analysts looked at those declining numbers and concluded that terrorism was waning. Others, inside and outside of government, continued to ignore the numbers and warn of the increasing danger from terrorism. The day after 9/11, of course, everyone realized that the second group had been correct. In the 1990s, while the number of attacks went down, the threat increased. So much for the argument that if we leave the hornet's nest alone it won't bother us.

Today, the number of attacks (according to U.S. statistics) is up, principally because terrorist activi-

ties in Iraq are included in the global numbers as international terrorist incidents. This is *not* evidence that we are creating more terrorists in appreciable numbers. The number of actual terrorists is still pretty modest. Consider, for example, that it is estimated that up to 40,000 persons passed through the terrorist training camps in Afghanistan. Where are they? Very few of them became real, active terrorists. And now after three years of insurgency in Iraq, the number of terrorists being “exported” throughout the world is still pretty small.

On the other hand, despite this fact, the number of individuals worldwide that die from “political violence” has been dropping since the end of the Cold War and continues to decline significantly. All the statistics show is what we already know: It is relatively cheap and easy for determined people to kill women going to the market to buy bread, couples sipping tea in a café, or children on their way to school.

The problem for al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda “look-alikes,” and any al-Qaeda “wannabes” is that killing is not winning. It is not winning anywhere. That should not be surprising. Terrorists rarely win. Terrorism is not a war-winning strategy.

True, terrorists succeed at killing people—murdering innocents, destroying property, and creating misery—but that is not their intended goal. Terrorism, by definition, is violence with a political purpose. And terrorists are terrorists not by choice, but by desperation. They kill men, women, and children indiscriminately because they think there is no other way to advance their cause. Propaganda and politics have failed them. They lack armies or economic power. As a rule, terrorism fails in the long run. It fails because, as a strategy, it lacks a theory of victory, a means to convert the desire to change the political order into reality. Terrorists only succeed by becoming armies and conquering territory, mass movements that overturn governments, or political parties that change policies. We have seen very few prospects since 9/11 that al-Qaeda’s actions will lead to any of these outcomes.

## Winning the Long War

Not only do we agree that we are fighting an enemy that is trying to kill us and that that enemy is changing (and, I would argue, failing, but still very

dangerous), there is also a trans-Atlantic consensus on how to deal with the threat. The war on terrorism, like the Cold War, will be a protracted conflict. As such, it requires a long-term strategy for victory. Long wars require different kinds of strategies, strategies that are as concerned with maintaining healthy societies as they are with getting the enemy. I think both Europeans and Americans recognize the need for that. We had such a balanced strategy in the Cold War—a strategy that included providing security, promoting economic growth, strengthening civil society, and winning the war of ideas. I think North American and European approaches to combating terrorism recognize the need for strategies that include all these components, strategies that address each component equally well, strategies that:

- **Provide security** by taking the offensive, taking the initiative away from the terrorists, eliminating leaders, disrupting plots, eliminating sanctuaries and sources of support, and providing for defense as well protecting the global networks that carry the free flow of goods, peoples, services, and ideas from being exploited by terrorists;
- **Promote economic growth** to sustain developed nations and lift developing nations out of poverty;
- **Protect the constitutional rights** of our citizens, refusing to trade off liberties for the promise of security—a trade that in the end only serves to undermine the civil society that it purports to defend; and
- **Promise credible alternatives** to the terrorist lie that social, political, religious, and economic ills can be cured through the indiscriminate murder of innocents.

There are ample signs that the U.S., in concert with other nations, is moving to refine terrorist fighting methods, but it is also clear they have a long way to go.

## What’s Next

If we come to agree on the nature of the war and the enemy, and how to fight them and accept that in this war no nation is, or can be, neutral, then what



should we worry about? We cannot expect the enemy to remain passive. They will, as they have demonstrated since 9/11, try to regain the initiative. And like any enemy, they have choices on where, when, and how to attempt to strike again. Here is what I think every European nation should worry about.

- **Terrorists seek and exploit weakness and inattention.** Al-Qaeda has sought to regroup and act in areas where it has met the least resistance. Nations may be attacked not because they are the most feared or hated enemy, but because they are the easiest target.
- **An attack on any nation affects all of us.** The immediate consequences of the 9/11 attack on the United States have been estimated at \$40 billion or more. The costs worldwide due to the disruption of air travel and the security costs imposed since the 9/11 attacks are many times that.
- **States should worry about “blowback.”** Any nation could potentially serve as a base for terrorist operations. Al-Qaeda is still a global enterprise. Nations that suffer terrorist strikes because other governments are inattentive to the threat of global terrorism will be less and less forgiving in the future.
- **Watch the Internet.** Traditionally, attention on the Internet has concerned the threat of cyberterrorism. In fact, terrorists are less concerned with attacking the Internet than they are with using it as their primary tool to recruit, train, organize, fund raise, gather intelligence, coordinate, plan, and advertise.

These worries suggest that no member of the family of nations can or should avoid its responsibilities to help combat transnational terrorism.

### What We Should Do

There are security initiatives in which every European nation should be participating, efforts that will help make all of us safer. The most critical are:

- **Support the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).** Taking the threat of catastrophic terrorism off the table must be job one. PSI is an international effort to proactively interdict the trading,

sale, shipment, and transfer of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, materials, precursors, and technology. This program deserves all our support.

- **Promote Information Sharing.** Bilateral information sharing between the North American and European countries has been remarkable and remarkably effective. We must resist all efforts to undermine this cooperation. Proposed European Union (EU) policies that would restrict law enforcement information sharing with countries that do not comply with EU privacy standards is a particularly onerous and wrong-headed initiative. The United States and European countries have different privacy regimes. One is not fundamentally better than the other, as the metric system is not fundamentally better or worse than measuring in “feet” and “pounds.” They are simply different. There is no significant privacy threat by sharing law enforcement information. The United States and European countries have been sharing such information for decades. The EU proposal, however, would make law enforcement information sharing with the United States a crime, and that is a crime, because sharing this information is all that stands between us and the terrorists.
- **Take an “All Hazards” Approach.** This goes for both preventing and responding to terrorist attacks. Nations should build one comprehensive emergency response system that deals with natural and manmade disasters, including terrorist attacks. Likewise, we need robust law enforcement that addresses all manner of transnational crime, not just terrorism. We need law enforcement and disaster response capabilities that are “dual-capable.”

### The Way Forward

There are no neutrals in this war. Neutrality was never an option. The enemy decided that. Al-Qaeda is at war with everyone and anyone who does not share its fascist dream of a totalitarian empire clothed with an idolatrous ideology crafted by the perversion of legitimate religious beliefs. Nor is there anything to be gained by seeking to be neutral.

We are safer when we all act to support the safety and security of one another. Such unified action requires consensus—a common view of the nature of the threat and the war, and a common vision of how to respond. The United States and Europe are closer to achieving this unity than the diatribes of pundits and politicians suggest. I believe we will achieve common purpose because it is in the interests of all of us to do so.

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