

The Journal Of *Peace, Prosperity & Freedom*

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The Years Since September 11, 2001: What Hath Our Rulers Wrought?

Lord Jesus Christ, Thou Prince of Peace, who hatest wars, in which men slay their own brothers and destroy those things which Thou hast given us to enjoy, forgive us for wars and fightings among us and for the lust of our flesh that begets them.

O Thou who makest wars to cease unto the ends of the earth, bring a speedy end to this reign of destruction and terror. Restore men to sanity so that they may see the insanity of war and avoid it as a sore plague of mankind and an offense to Thy holy majesty.

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INTRODUCTION

At the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg during 1945-46, Anglo-American élites subjected the most senior henchmen of Adolph Hitler – a murderer of millions – to something resembling rule of law and a fair trial. In 1962 the Israeli secret service, Mossad, captured Adolph Eichmann (who during the Second World War managed the mass deportation of Jews to extermination camps) in Argentina and spirited him to Israel. He faced 15 criminal charges, including crimes against humanity and war crimes, and is the only person executed in Israel after conviction by a civilian court.

Yet on May 2, 2011 the U.S. Government did not even consider the pretence of due process and a fair trial according to the rule of law. Instead, its military planned and executed the premeditated murder of Osama bin Laden (who, among other things, masterminded the

¹ 'Prayer During Wartime', *My Prayer Book*, Concordia Publishing House, 1957.

killing of approximately 3,000 people on September 11, 2001). It could be asked therefore, to what depths have today's rulers sunk? Those who recognise a distinction between justice and revenge would argue it is imperative that a mass murderer, whether a National Socialist or an Islamic fanatic, receive a fair trial – not because he 'deserves' natural justice, but because if he does then chances are very good that ordinary people charged with lesser offences will too. If we take the rule of law seriously then no person is above the law. But if we do not then agents of the state inevitably rise above the law.²

One might have assumed that President Barack Obama, a graduate of Harvard Law School, would be at least dimly aware of the ramifications of assassinating bin Laden without due process. But his official remarks dispelled any such illusion:

Last August, after years of painstaking work by our intelligence community, I was briefed on a possible lead to bin Laden ... And finally, last week, I determined that we had enough intelligence to take action, and authorized an operation to get Osama bin Laden and bring him to justice... Today, at my direction, the United States launched a targeted operation against [a] compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan... After a firefight, they killed Osama bin Laden and took custody of his body.

[A]-Qaeda has slaughtered scores of Muslims in many countries, including our own. So his demise should be welcomed by all who believe in peace and human dignity... [O]n nights like this one, we can say to those families who have lost loved ones to al-Qaeda's terror: Justice has been done.³

Many Australians shared these sentiments.⁴ According to Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard, bin Laden's death provided 'some small measure of justice' for the loved ones of the people who died on 11 September.⁵ Meanwhile Paul Kelly wrote in *The Australian* that

2 Steven Greenhut, 'But America IS a Police State', Retrieved from <<http://lewrockwell.com/greenhut/greenhut66.1.html>>; Glenn Greenwald, 'A Prime Aim of the Growing Surveillance State', Retrieved from <http://www.salon.com/2011/08/19/surveillance_13/>.

3 'Remarks by the President on Osama Bin Laden', Retrieved from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/02/remarks-president-osama-bin-laden>>.

4 In diametric contrast: Rae and Jack Tompsett don't have much time for feelings of vengeance. No amount of revenge rhetoric after the death of Osama bin Laden is going to ease the daily pain caused by the absence of their son, Steve, from their lives. 'It's nearly 10 years ago. We miss him to this day, and there are hundreds and thousands of families in the same position,' Mrs Tompsett said yesterday from her Sydney home. The Tompsetts lost their son in the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York. He was one of 10 Australians to die in the World Trade Centre that day.' One of the first things Mrs Tompsett said when speaking to *The Australian* yesterday was that she felt sorry for the hijackers who killed her son and thousands of others that morning. 'I also feel sad for the young men who flew the planes, that they felt they were doing something good for God. They were very misled,' she said. Mrs Tompsett said it was a relief bin Laden had finally been killed and that she 'can't be sorry,' but she does not think it will do much to stop Islamic terrorism ... Mrs Tompsett does not view bin Laden and al-Qaeda as representing the true teachings of the Islamic faith. 'Islamic teaching is basically about charity and love and care for one another. Unfortunately, over the centuries some of it has been warped to include annihilating anyone who's not Muslim,' she said (Leo Shanahan and Michael Owen, 'Families of Victims Find Shock Outweighs Relief', *The Australian*, 3 May 2011).

5 Paul Osborne, 'Bin Laden Death Is Justice for Victims: PM', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 May 2011.

'The killing of Osama bin Laden is an epic event and a rallying triumph for the US.'⁶ And on May 5 that same newspaper editorialised:

Justice and the law are not always congruent and in the haze of war the law of self-preservation is likely to prevail... [M]uch of the legalistic condemnation of bin Laden's death smacks of pointless moral posturing... [T]here are pragmatic reasons why we are all better off without bin Laden surviving to create an international propaganda circus that would have endangered even more lives... bin Laden's imprisonment would... have provided an ongoing rallying cry for terrorists in Afghanistan and further afield, possibly leading to the loss of more soldiers' lives. And fears would have been raised around the world about his fanatical supporters attacking or taking hostage Americans, Australians or any Westerners, to keep the terror alive. In the pragmatic ways of the world, not the abstract realm of attention-seeking human rights lawyers, it is a good and just thing that bin Laden is dead.⁷

Is bin Laden's death really a time to rejoice? Or is it instead a time to reflect and ask that others forgive our sins against them and that we forgive others' sins against us? The unspeakable truth is that the 'War on Terror' is a war of terror waged upon innocent civilians in impoverished lands – lands which have been impoverished not least by relentless Western meddling. Moreover, the War on Terror is one of America's most comprehensive diplomatic, economic and military defeats, one which the U.S. Government has inflicted upon its own subjects. In the torrents of discussion, it is likely that the following corollaries of this awful truth will be completely ignored:

- The events of 9/11 were a temporary deviation ('outlier') rather than a permanent shift: they bore no relation to previous terrorist attacks; and thus far nothing like them has recurred. Indeed, outside the Middle East and South Asia, the incidence and toll of terrorist attacks has been falling since the early 1990s. Even including the toll of 9/11, terrorism poses an extremely small and insignificant risk to the life of any American or resident of a Western country (apart from Israel). If a long series of attacks struck the U.S., each on the scale of 9/11, the risk to any one American would still be far smaller than the risks – such as diabetes, heart disease etc. – that cause people to shrug their shoulders rather than lose their heads.⁸

- It is very difficult for terrorists to obtain – much less deploy – chemical, biological or nuclear weapons, and even if they did the resulting toll of death would likely be a small fraction of what our rulers allege. Even if terrorists launched a WMD attack whose death toll were many times that of 9/11, the risk to any one person would still be very small.

⁶ 'Justice Delayed But Finally Delivered', *The Australian*, 4 May 2011.

⁷ 'Don't Cry for Osama bin Laden', *The Australian*, 5 May 2011.

⁸ In 2005, almost one-half of Americans worried that they or their families could be killed by terrorists – a level of concern higher than it was four years earlier, even though no attacks occurred in the interim (or, for that matter, since 2005). That level vastly exceeds the concern about diabetes, heart disease and stroke – each of which are many times more likely to kill.

I. WHAT IS TERRORISM?

Although there exists no universally agreed legally binding criminal law definition of terrorism, politicians routinely use the term to refer to acts of violence undertaken to achieve ideological, political or religious ends. By this conception, terrorism is a means that the relatively weak pit against the comparatively strong. People and organisations whom Western governments label ‘terrorists’ intend to create fear by targeting or disregarding the safety of civilians. In his study of the subject Bruce Hoffman confirms these attributes, concluding that terrorism:

- has political or ideological motives and aims;
- is violent (or threatens violence);
- seeks a far-reaching psychological impact beyond its immediate victim or target, usually by instilling fear into the general public;
- is conducted by an organisation with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure; and
- *is perpetrated by a sub-national group or non-state entity* (emphasis added).⁹

Hoffman’s list conveniently excludes acts of state terrorism and war. Yet is there a legitimate reason to exculpate the state, given that the conventional concept of terrorism is often used by state authorities to delegitimize political opponents and legitimize the state’s use of armed force? Senior American military officials – including William Odom, a three-star general who was Director of the National Security Administration under Ronald Reagan – have frankly acknowledged that the U.S. Government has long resorted to state terrorism, and have thus noted the hypocrisy of the conventional use of the term ‘terrorism’.¹⁰

If the last dot point were omitted from Hoffman’s list would not the bulk of Western foreign policy be indistinguishable from terrorism? ¹¹ Save for this caveat was not the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in March 2003 a war crime?¹² In light of the evidence that now

⁹ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, Columbia University Press, 2006, p. 41.

¹⁰ In *American Hegemony: How to Use It, How to Lose It*, Odom wrote: ‘As many critics have pointed out, terrorism is not an enemy. It is a tactic. Because the United States itself has a long record of supporting terrorists and using terrorist tactics, the slogans of today’s war on terrorism merely makes the United States look hypocritical to the rest of the world.’

¹¹ See in particular Myra Williamson, *Terrorism, War and International Law: The Legality of The Use of Force against Afghanistan in 2001*, Ashgate Publishing, 2009, p. 38. See also Alex P. Schmid, “The Definition of Terrorism,” *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*, Routledge, 2011 p. 39.

¹² A war crime is a general label used to describe one of three specific crimes enumerated and described in Article 6 of the Charter of the International Military Tribunal (IMT). Immediately after the end of the Second World War, the governments of the “Big Four” (i.e., the U.S.A., Soviet Union, Britain and France) established the IMT in order to prosecute the leaders of National Socialist Germany and its allies. The Tribunal’s Charter,

crowds the public domain, a strong case can be made that between 2001-2003 American, British and Australian leaders and their advisers engaged in or acquiesced to the ‘planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression’ – that is, they plotted and committed a war crime. Neither Saddam Hussein nor the Iraqi military posed a credible threat to any Western country; nor did either Saddam or his military have the faintest connection to the attacks of 9/11.¹³ The many revelations by former insiders, coupled with the Downing Street Memo, Lewis (‘Scooter’) Libby indictment and numerous other sources, leave little doubt that these insiders intentionally deceived the world in order to invade a country that posed little threat to anybody except its own unfortunate subjects.

Accordingly, and by the precedent set at Nuremberg, the misleading and ever-changing rationales uttered before, during and after the invasion of Iraq exonerate nobody.¹⁴ The precedent established by America and Britain at Nuremberg in 1946 condemned them in 2003: to invade a country that has neither the means nor the intention to attack you – whether or not the invaders know it when they plan and execute their invasion – is a crime against peace. In other words, whether it is waged by Nazis or neo-conservatives, a ‘pre-emptive’ war is necessarily a war crime. The ironic fact that between 1991 and 2003 Saddam Hussein was virtually the only person (Hans Blix completes the list) who spoke truth to power about WMDs in Iraq speaks volumes about the determination of Western politicians to twist information in order to indulge their inflexible prejudices.

published on 8 August 1945, declared in Article 6: “The following acts, or any of them, are crimes coming within the jurisdiction of the Tribunal for which there shall be individual responsibility:

- “*Crimes against Peace*: namely, planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression, or a war in violation of international treaties, agreements or assurances, or participation in a Common Plan or Conspiracy for the accomplishment of any of the foregoing.”
- “*War Crimes*: namely, violations of the laws or customs of war. Such violations shall include, but not be limited to, murder, ill-treatment or deportation to slave labour or for any other purpose of civilian population of or in occupied territory, murder or ill-treatment of prisoners of war or persons on the seas, killing of hostages, plunder of public or private property, wanton destruction of cities, towns, or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity...”

13 See in particular Justin Raimondo, ‘The Lying Game’, Retrieved from <<http://www.antiwar.com/justin/j020703.html>>.

14 The Nuremberg Tribunal explicitly prohibited *tu quoque* (“you did it too!”) defences – hardly a surprise, given that it rendered victors’ justice. The prosecuting powers sought to obscure the inconvenient fact that during the war their civilian and military leaders, as well as a few of their officers and enlisted men, had issued and obeyed orders that fell well short of the standards imposed upon Hitler’s henchmen. This prohibition set a bad precedent. Surely justice, if it is worthy of the name, cannot be restricted to particular times, places and people? That is, if the invasion of Poland was a crime against peace when Adolf Hitler and high-ranking German officers and diplomats planned and executed it in 1939, then surely the invasion of Iraq, when planned and committed in 2001–2003 by George W. Bush, Tony Blair, John Howard and their military and diplomatic subordinates, is no less a crime against peace?

Table 1: Some Recent Victims of Western Democratic Aggression

Source	Number Iraqi Civilian Deaths Attributable to the Anglo-American Invasion and Occupation	From March 2003 to ...
Iraq Body Count	80,419 to 87,834 civilian deaths reported in English-language media (including Arabic media translated into English)	Jan 2008
Opinion Research Business survey	1,033,000 violent deaths (range of 946,000 to 1,120,000) as a result of the conflict	Aug 2007
Iraqi Health Ministry survey	151,000 violent deaths (range of 104,000 to 223,000) out of 400,000 excess deaths due to war	Jun 2006
Lancet survey	601,027 violent deaths out of 654,965 excess deaths	Jun 2006

Moreover, and again in light of the body of evidence available to anybody prepared to consider it dispassionately, it appears that senior American and British politicians (and some military personnel obeying their orders) have committed ‘violations of the laws or customs of war’ including ‘murder . . . of civilian population of or in occupied territory, murder or ill-treatment of prisoners of war... plunder of public or private property, wanton destruction of cities, towns, or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity’. Acts that fit this description occurred at Falluja, Haditha, Mahmoudiya, Samarra, Tikrit, the Abu Ghraib Prison and other locations.

A. War on Terror or a War of Terror?

Is terrorism a crime against the person, or is it an act of war against the state? Although the U.S. Government and media have not, to my knowledge, explicitly asked this question, their rhetoric suggests that since 11 September 2001 they have not for a minute doubted the answer. ‘The deliberate and deadly attacks which were carried out yesterday against our country were more than acts of terror. They were acts of war. This will require our country to unite in steadfast determination and resolve. Freedom and democracy are under attack,’ declared George W. Bush on 12 September 2001.

According to Wikipedia, ‘the War on Terror is an international military campaign led by the United States and the United Kingdom with the support of other North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as well as non-NATO countries. Originally, the campaign was waged against al-Qaeda and other militant organizations with the purpose of eliminating them.’ That last sentence implies that the War of Terror has vastly over-promised and under-delivered, and has cost far more than even its harshest critics ever envisaged. It has failed to achieve its original goals, and has spawned negative unintended consequences.

On 16 September 2001, George W. Bush first uttered the phrase ‘war on terror’. On 20 September, during a televised address to a joint session of Congress, he launched it: ‘Our war on terror begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated’. Barack Obama has

rarely used the phrase, but in his inaugural address on 20 January 2009 he declared: 'Our nation is at war, against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred'. In March 2009 his administration requested that American military personnel avoid the use of the term, and that they instead adopt the phrase 'Overseas Contingency Operation'.¹⁵

Given that this war's enemy is at best indistinct and at worst unidentifiable, and that military means have historically seldom been able to quell terrorism – and, indeed, have often worsened it – its critics have contended that the term 'war' is misconceived.¹⁶ In Britain, the Director of Public Prosecutions and head of the Crown Prosecution Service, Ken McDonald, has stated that the perpetrators of acts of terrorism such as the 7 July 2005 bombings in London are not 'soldiers' or 'combatants' in a war, but 'inadequates' for whom the criminal justice system is the proper jurisdiction.¹⁷ On 19 September 2008, the RAND Corporation presented to the United States House Armed Services Committee the results of a comprehensive study entitled *Defeating Terrorist Groups*. It concluded 'by far the most effective strategy against religious groups has been the use of local police and intelligence services, which were responsible for the end of 73% of [terrorist] groups since 1968'. RAND recommended that the military 'should generally resist being drawn into combat operations in Muslim countries where its presence is likely to increase terrorist recruitment'.

Other critics, such as Francis Fukuyama, have echoed William Odom and go much further: because terrorism is not an enemy but a tactic, a 'war on terror' obscures vital differences between conflicts and launches a war that by definition is unwinnable. As the linguist George Lakoff has argued, terror is an abstract noun (concept).¹⁸ Therefore a war on terror is a logical impossibility – and strong evidence of its proponents' woolly thinking. 'Wars' on ambushes, seeking and turning flanks, patrolling the perimeter, maintaining reconnaissance, creating and using obstacles and defences, using ground to one's best advantage, etc. – not to mention forks, skewers, batteries, discovered attacks, undermining, overloading, deflection, pins and interference – are equally laughable. Lakoff concludes: "Terror cannot be destroyed by weapons or signing a peace treaty. A war on terror has no end." During a visit to the U.S. on 30 July 2007, the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown let the cat out of the bag when he defined the War on Terror as 'a generational battle'.

George W. Bush has effectively conceded that the War on Terror will be perpetual and therefore unwinnable. No matter how many terrorists one captures or how many terrorist groups one extinguishes, if one addresses symptoms rather than causes of terrorism then new terrorists and groups will constantly arise. In August 2005, the Oxford Research

15 See Scott Wilson and Al Kamen, "Global War on Terror' Is Given New Name," *The Washington Post*, 25 March 2009.

16 See, for example, Todd Richissin, "'War on Terror' Difficult to Define," *The Baltimore Sun*, 2 September 2004.

17 'There Is No War on Terror in the UK, says DPP,' *The Times*, 24 January 2007

18 'War on Terror, Rest in Peace', Retrieved from <http://www.alternet.org/story/23810/war_on_terror%2C_rest_in_peace>.

Group reported “al-Qaeda and its affiliates remain active and effective, with a stronger support base and a higher intensity of attacks than before 9/11 ... Far from winning the ‘war on terror’, the second George W. Bush administration is maintaining policies that ... are actually increasing violent anti-Americanism”. Accordingly, to declare (as Bush did) that the war on terror ‘will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated’ is to concede that it will never end.

The notion of a war against terrorism – and the underlying insistence that terrorism is an act of war against the state rather than a crime against the person – is not just logically untenable: it has ensured that, like the state’s other wars such as the War on Drugs and War on Poverty, it will fail abysmally. The War *on* Terror has become a war *of* terror.

B. *What Does Al-Qaeda Want?*

In ‘Sizing Up the New Toned-Down Bin Laden’, Don Van Natta, Jr. wrote:

What does Osama bin Laden want? The vexing question emerged again last week with the release of an audiotape on which the al-Qaeda leader seems to be speaking. On it, he applauds the December 6 [2004] attack against the United States Consulate in Jidda, Saudi Arabia, and urges the toppling of the Saudi royal family.

The tape indicated that bin Laden has apparently moved the fomenting of a revolution in his Saudi homeland toward the top of his lengthy and ambitious wish list, which also includes the reversal of American foreign policy in the Middle East, the retreat of the American military from the Arabian Peninsula and the creation of a Palestinian homeland.¹⁹

Why do terrorists attack the West? Not because we’re here, but because our rulers and their military forces are over there. Terrorists retaliate against the West not because we’re Westerners, but because our political masters relentlessly meddle, oppress, shoot, bombard and otherwise help to make life (particularly in the Middle East) even more miserable than local despotic governments have already made it.²⁰

On 11 March 2005, *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* released extracts from Saif al-Adel’s document entitled *Al-Qaeda’s Strategy to the Year 2020*. This strategy comprises five stages:

1. Provoke the United States and its allies into the invasion of a Muslim nation.
2. Incite local resistance to the occupying forces.

¹⁹ *The New York Times*, 19 December 2004.

²⁰ See in particular three books by Chalmers Johnson. The first is *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (Holt Paperbacks, 2004); the second is *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (Metropolitan Books, 2004); and the third is *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic* (Metropolitan Books, 2007).

3. Expand the conflict to neighbouring countries, and engage the U.S. in a long and widespread war of attrition.
4. Develop al-Qaeda into an ideology and set of operating principles that can be loosely franchised in other countries without requiring direct command and control; and via these franchises incite attacks against the U.S. (and countries allied to it) until they withdraw from the conflict.
5. Bleed the U.S. economy (and those of the nations whose militaries run fools errands for Uncle Sam) so severely that it finally collapses under the strain of too many military engagements in too many places; and more generally to prompt the worldwide economic system which depends upon the largesse of the U.S. also to collapse – leading to global political instability, which in turn will allegedly beget a global jihad led by Al-Qaeda and a Wahhibi Caliphate will then be installed across the world.²¹ Regarding the economic collapse of the U.S., Abdel Bari Atwan concludes: ‘If this sounds far-fetched, it is sobering to consider that this [strategy] virtually describes the downfall of the Soviet Union.’²²

A book by Robert Pape of the University of Chicago entitled *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* flatly contradicts many of the mainstream’s most cherished and fervent beliefs. Based on an analysis of every known case of suicide terrorism from 1980 to 2003 (315 attacks as part of 18 campaigns), Pape concludes that there is ‘little connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, or any one of the world’s religions ... Rather, what nearly all suicide terrorist attacks have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland.’²³ ‘The taproot of suicide terrorism is nationalism,’ he argues; it is ‘an extreme strategy for national liberation.’²⁴ Pape’s research has examined groups ranging from al-Qaeda to the Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers. Notably, he also substantiates a growing body of literature that finds that the majority of suicide terrorists do not come from an impoverished or uneducated background, but rather have middle class origins and a significant level of education.

21 According to Michael Scheuer (*Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror*, Potomac Books, 2004) Osama bin Laden has repeatedly demanded that the U.S. make five changes to its foreign policy: i) end all aid to Israel; ii) withdraw military forces from the Arabian Peninsula and all Muslim territory; iii) end all involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq; iv) end U.S. support for the oppression of Muslims in China, Russia, India and elsewhere; and v) restore Muslim control of the Islamic world’s energy resources for the benefit of Muslims. A sixth point is the replacement of U.S.-backed regimes in the Muslim world with Islamic ones, but that is really an exhortation on the Muslim population.

22 *The Secret History of Al-Qaeda*, University of California Press, 2006, p. 221.

23 *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, p. 4.

24 *Ibid.* pp. 79-80.

II. ODDS ARE, YOU DON'T KNOW HOW MINISCULE THE ODDS ARE

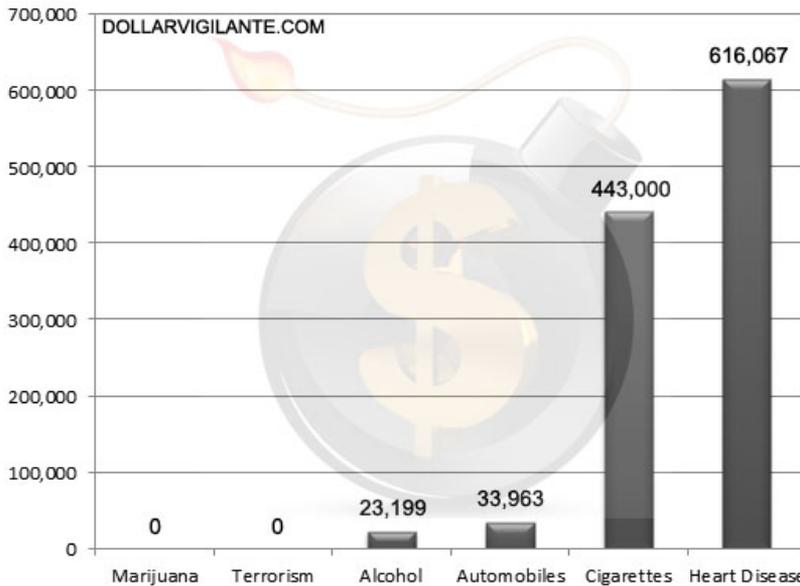
Approximately 3,000 people died in the attacks on 11 September 2001. At the time, the population of the U.S. was around 281 million. The chance that the attacks killed a randomly-selected American resident was therefore 0.00106%, or 1 in 93,000. Similarly, the chance that any randomly-selected person who resided in the New York metropolitan area died was 0.025%, or 1 in 4,000. If a terrorist attack had occurred in the U.S. once each month during 2001, and if each attack killed 3,000 people, then the total number of dead would have been 36,000. That sounds horrific, and it is; but it would not have posed a mortal – or even an unusual – threat to the average American. The chance that this carnage would kill a randomly-selected American would have been about 0.0127%, which is roughly 1 in 7,750. By comparison, the annual risk that an American dies in a motor-vehicle accident is 1 in 6,498. So why hasn't the annual carnage on America's roads – which has existed for a century – prompted Washington to unleash a War on Car Crashes? Is it because it's much more difficult to portray the American Dream as a bogeyman than a Muslim?

According to the RAND-MIPT terrorism database – which seems to be the most comprehensive available – 10,119 international terrorist incidents occurred around the world between 1968 and mid-2007. Those attacks took the lives of 14,790 people (an average of 1.5 people per incident), and thereby extracted an average annual worldwide death toll of 379. Clearly, what the world and particularly Americans saw on 11 September 2001 bore absolutely no relation to what had occurred previously – or what has transpired since. Terrorism (like road crashes, domestic violence, etc.) is dreadful, and every death it inflicts is a crime. But 379 deaths per year is, on a worldwide scale and relative to the total number of deaths from all causes, a microscopic number. In the U.S. alone in 2003, 497 people accidentally suffocated in bed; 396 were unintentionally electrocuted; 515 drowned in swimming pools; police officers killed 347 and garden-variety criminals (that is, criminals other than terrorists) murdered 16,503 Americans.²⁵

It is also important to emphasise that the average worldwide number of people killed annually in terrorist incidents, 379, vastly overstates the actual risk faced by Americans, Britons and residents of other Western countries. Most of these deaths occur in distant and tumultuous regions like Kashmir and Sri Lanka. In North America between 1968 and 2007, all terrorists incidents combined – including the attacks on 11 September 2001 – killed 3,765 people, only slightly more than the number of Americans killed whilst riding a motorbike in the single year 2003. In Western Europe, the death toll from terrorism between 1968 and April 2007 was 1,233. That's an average of 32 deaths per year – a mere 6% of the number of lives (500) that experts believe are lost every year in Europe to naturally-occurring radon gas.

²⁵ For background and elaboration, see *Injury Facts* published by the American Safety Council.

TOTAL DEATHS IN THE US (2009)



In 2005, the U.S. Government requested that K.T. Bogen and E.D. Jones of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory conduct a comprehensive statistical analysis of the RAND-MIPT database.²⁶ Bogen and Jones concluded that, for the sake of a clear understanding of the risk posed by terrorism, the world should be divided into two areas: the State of Israel and Everywhere Else. In Israel, terrorism is indeed a serious threat – and among Palestinians, the Israeli military is an even bigger threat. In Israel, the chance of injury or death through terrorism over a lifetime of 70 years ranged between 0.1% and 1% -- which is high enough that most people in that country will know someone who has been injured, if not killed, in a terrorist attack. But in the rest of the world, the lifetime risk of injury or death is between 1 in 10,000 and 1 in one million. Compare those odds to an American's lifetime risk of being killed by lightning (1 in 79,746), being killed by a venomous plant or animal (1 in 39,873), drowning in a bathtub (1 in 11,289), committing suicide (1 in 119) or dying in a car crash (1 in 84). Bogen and Jones observed that if the risk posed by terrorism were considered in a public-health context, it would certainly fall within the range that regulators called *de minimis* – in plain English, ‘too small for concern’.

A. But You're Ignoring the Existential Threat of WMDs!

Few Western politicians, regardless of their partisan stripe, accept the above premises and reasoning. Hence they reject the conclusion that terrorism poses a minimal risk to Westerners. Instead, they maintain that this conclusion ignores the ‘real risk’ of terrorism. The statistics that demonstrate that terrorism isn't a major killer – and at worst is a very

²⁶ See ‘Risks of Mortality and Morbidity from Worldwide Terrorism: 1968–2004’, *Risk Analysis*, 26:1, February 2006, pp. 45-59.

minor risk – are irrelevant. The declining incidence of terrorist attacks around the world since the early 1990s in most parts of the world is also irrelevant. The fact that 9/11 was very unlikely to succeed, almost didn't and probably wouldn't if it were tried again – that, too, is considered irrelevant. The mainstream shouts in unison: 'if terrorists obtain weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), then they will inflict the sort of devastation that in the past only the state's armies, navies and air forces could wreak!' This risk, they say, is unprecedented; accordingly, they insist that the risk of terrorism vastly exceeds virtually all others. Thus terrorism is an 'existential risk' – one which has the potential to destroy, or drastically restrict, human civilisation. According to Michael Ignatieff:

Consider the consequences of a second major attack on the mainland United States – the detonation of a radiological or dirty bomb, perhaps, or a low-yield nuclear device or a chemical strike in a subway. Any of these events could cause death, devastation and panic on a scale that would make 9/11 seem like a pale prelude. After such an attack, a pall of mourning, melancholy, anger and fear would hang over our public life for a generation.

An attack of this sort is already in the realm of possibility. The recipes for making ultimate weapons are on the Internet, and the materiel required is available for the right price. Democracies live by free markets, but a free market in everything – enriched uranium, ricin, anthrax – will mean the death of democracy. Armageddon is being privatized, and unless we shut down these markets, doomsday will be for sale. Sept. 11, for all its horror, was a conventional attack. We have the best of reasons to fear the fire next time.²⁷

Almost every word of this passage is nonsense, and we need merely to look at Israel's history in order to reject it. International terrorism in its modern form dates from the 1960s, and in all that time Israelis have suffered grievously from its ravages. For many of the world's worst terrorists – those who do not hesitate to strap explosives to children – the State of Israel is the object of intense hatred. Their most ardent desire is to push the tiny country into the Mediterranean, and these terrorists have regularly enjoyed the sponsorship of Middle Eastern states that share the dream of destroying the 'Zionist entity' but don't dare to attack it directly. And yet Israel has never suffered an attack by terrorists armed with WMDs. That seems a strong indication that getting and using such weapons isn't nearly as easy as most of us think – and as our rulers would have us to believe.

In principle, terrorists could obtain viruses, nuclear weapons and the like from black markets; realistically, however, such scenarios are the stuff of James Bond movies and silly newspaper articles trafficking in the realm of rumor and speculation. Terrorists could also obtain WMDs from nations that possess such weapons and would like to see Israel and the U.S. suffer. But the henchmen of any country pondering such a move has to consider the distinct possibility that if their role in such an attack were uncovered, then their country would quickly be reduced to rubble – either by Israel's conventional or nuclear forces.

²⁷ See 'Lesser Evils', *The New York Times Magazine*, 2 May 2004.

Annihilation is a significant deterrent: Osama bin Laden's followers may desire martyrdom – but Kim Jong Il and Iranian dictators do not. In addition they must worry that 'the surrogate cannot be trusted, even to the point of using the weapon against its sponsor,' noted the 1999 report of the Gilmore Committee.²⁸ These considerations have for decades prevented states from supplying terrorists with nuclear, chemical or biological weapons.

That leaves the Do-It-Yourself option. Many media reports – like that of Ignatieff – imply that WMDs can be manufactured with little more than an undergraduate degree, a recipe hacked from the Internet and some spare space in the garage. In actual fact, found the Gilmore Committee:

The hurdles faced by terrorists seeking to develop true weapons of mass casualties and mass destruction are more formidable than is often imagined. This report does not argue that terrorists cannot produce and disseminate biological and chemical agents capable of injuring or indeed killing relatively small numbers of persons ... or perhaps inflicting serious casualties even in the hundreds. The point is that creating truly mass-casualty weapons – capable of killing tens of thousands, much less in the thousands – requires advanced university training in appropriate scientific and technical disciplines, obtainable but nonetheless sophisticated equipment and facilities, the ability to carry out rigorous testing to ensure a weapon's effectiveness, and the development and employment of effective means of dissemination. [These demands are so formidable that they] appear, at least for now, to be beyond the reach not only of the vast majority of existent terrorist organizations but also of many established nation-states.

Similarly, a report entitled *Weapons of Mass Destruction – the Terrorist Threat* issued by the Congressional Research Service in 1999 concluded:

Terrorist ability to produce or obtain WMD may be growing due to looser controls of stockpiles and technology in the former Soviet Union and the dissemination of technology and information. However, WMD are significantly harder to produce or obtain than what is commonly depicted in the press and today they probably remain beyond the reach of most terrorist groups. The Central Intelligence Agency believes that it is likely that terrorists will continue to choose conventional explosives over WMD.

The obsession with Islamists has clouded judgment: politicians in the West have forgotten that the first religious zealots to obtain and deploy WMDs belonged to the Japanese cult

²⁸ The U.S. Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Attorney General, the Secretary of Energy, the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency entered into a contract with the RAND National Defense Research Institute (NDRI), to establish the Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction. Commonly known as the Gilmore Committee or the Gilmore Commission, it released its first report in 1999 and its fifth and final report in December 2003.

of Aum Shinrikyo.

Led by Shoko Asahara, Aum was fixated on the idea of inflicting mass-casualty terrorist attacks in hopes of sparking an apocalyptic war. Aum's resources were formidable. At its peak, the cult boasted a membership of 60,000 and offices in Australia, Germany, Russia and the U.S. It had at least several hundred million dollars of cash, and perhaps as much as \$1 billion of assets. And it had highly skilled members: Aum went to the best universities in Japan and aggressively courted postgraduate students in biology, chemistry, physics and engineering. Aum also gave them some of the finest equipment and facilities money could buy. At one point, its membership included 20 scientists working on biological weapons, and another 80 investigated chemical weapons. Aum also sought nuclear weapons, and even purchased a 500,000-acre sheep station in a remote part of Australia with plans to mine uranium and ship it to Japan where, according to the Gilmore Committee, 'scientists using laser enrichment technology would convert it into weapons-grade nuclear material'. In Russia, the group bought large quantities of small arms 'and is known to have been in the market for advanced weaponry, such as tanks, jet fighters, surface-to-surface rocket launchers and even a tactical nuclear weapon.'

In short, Aum overlooked no opportunity to wreak mass havoc. When in October 2002 an outbreak of the Ebola virus occurred in central Africa, Shoko Asahara personally led 40 of his followers to the region on what was allegedly a humanitarian mission. Officials now believe Aum attempted to collect samples of the virus so it could be mass-produced in Japan. Their efforts failed.

This was hardly Aum's only failure. The cult's first known bio-terror attack involved the spraying of botulinum toxin – the extremely deadly substance that causes botulism – from three trucks at targets that included American naval bases, an airport, Japan's parliament and the Imperial Palace. No one got sick; indeed, nobody even knew there had been attacks – the truth was discovered three years later. Another botulinum attack in July 1993 also failed. That same month, the cult's first anthrax attack failed. In all, Aum made nine attempts to inflict mass death with two of the most feared bioterrorism weapons. They killed no one. It seems that not even Aum with all its resources could overcome the many practical barriers to isolating virulent forms of the deadly pathogens and disseminating them broadly.

Hence the cult switched its focus to chemical weapons and nerve agents. Here, Aum met with considerable success, producing substantial quantities of mustard gas, sodium cyanide, VX and sarin – the latter two being among the deadliest nerve gases. When police finally raided Aum's facilities in 1995, the cult possessed enough sarin to kill an estimated 4.2 million people. Does that terrify you? Quite the contrary: it should reassure you. After all, here was a cult that wanted to kill millions, and which had cleared the many barriers between it and the possession of weapons that were at least theoretically capable of doing just that. And yet Aum *still* failed to cause mass death.

On 27 June 1994, Aum's members drove a converted refrigerator truck into a residential

neighborhood of Matsumoto, Japan. Inside, terrorists activated a computer-controlled system that heated liquid sarin to a vapour and blew it into the air with a fan. The wind conditions were perfect, slowly nudging the deadly cloud toward windows left open to the warm night air. Seven people died and more than 140 suffered serious injuries. On 20 March 1995, Aum tried another delivery method. Five members dressed in business suits and carrying umbrellas stepped aboard five different trains in the heart of Tokyo's notoriously-crowded subway system. In all, they carried 11 plastic bags filled with sarin. Placing the bags on the floor, the terrorists poked holes in them with their umbrellas and fled the trains. Three of the 11 bags failed to rupture. The other eight spilled roughly 159 ounces of sarin. As the liquid spread, it evaporated and vapors rose. Twelve people died. Five more were critically injured but survived. Another 37 were deemed severely injured, while 984 suffered modest symptoms.

Japanese authorities, belatedly alerted to Aum's scope and intentions, raided its properties all over the country. What they discovered astounded them. Despite the cult's vast resources, despite its murderous ambitions, despite its many efforts to acquire the means of slaughter and despite the repeated attacks, the police had little idea what was happening in their midst. It is hard to imagine a worse scenario: a fanatical cult with a burning desire to inflict mass slaughter has heaps of money, international connections, excellent equipment and laboratories, scientists trained at top-flight universities and years of near-total freedom to pursue its operations. And yet Aum's 17 attacks with chemical and biological weapons took far fewer lives than the 168 people who died in Oklahoma City when Timothy McVeigh detonated a single bomb made of fertiliser and motor-racing fuel.

The Gilmore Committee concluded:

Aum's experience suggests – however counter-intuitively or contrary to popular belief – the significant technological difficulties faced by any non-state entity in attempting to weaponize and disseminate chemical and biological weapons effectively.

Crucial to this failure, the Committee noted, is the atmosphere within a conspiracy fuelled by mania: 'Aum scientists, socially and physically isolated and ruled by an increasingly paranoid leader, became divorced from reality and unable to make sound judgments'. For terrorists with dreams of apocalypse, this is very discouraging; for exactly this reason, it should comfort the rest of us. Al-Qaeda and other Islamist terrorists possess very few of Aum's advantages. They lack the money, infrastructure and equipment, the freedom from scrutiny and the ability to travel openly. Most importantly, they do not have the scientists – al-Qaeda has tried to recruit them but has consistently failed, which is the main reason they have never shown even a fraction of Aum's technical sophistication.

Aum's experience demonstrates that the probability of mass-casualty terrorist attacks using chemical or biological weapons is greater than zero, but that it is far closer to zero than to one. Terrorists quickly encounter many serious technical and logistical obstacles if they start down this path. That's a compelling reason why even the most sophisticated and ruthless terrorists have stuck to bombs and bullets – or, in the case of the worst terrorist

attack in history, box cutters and aeroplane tickets.

Of course, the calculations change when weapons go nuclear. ‘Perhaps the only certain way for terrorists to achieve *bona fide* mass destruction would be to use a nuclear weapon,’ wrote the Gilmore Committee. A nuclear attack would undoubtedly be an almost unimaginable horror, and the contemplation of that horror inevitably stirs emotions strong enough to overpower any thought of probabilities. But probability is always important in dealing with risks, especially catastrophic risks. By far the biggest risk that humanity faces is not nuclear terrorism: it is a collision with an asteroid or comet of planet-killing size. If we considered only the potential destruction of such an event and ignored its probability – that is, if we launched a War on Mega-Asteroids akin to a War on Terror – we would pour trillions of dollars into the construction of vast, impenetrable and globe-girdling defence systems to protect our leaders while many of the rest of us died. But virtually everybody would say, quite rightly, that that’s a waste of resources because the probability of mass extinction by collision is tiny and the money could do a lot more good down on earth. We shouldn’t ignore the threat from asteroids; at the same time, we shouldn’t go crazy about it. The same cool head should be brought to bear with respect to nuclear terrorism.

B. How Likely Is the Mushroom Cloud? What Damage Might It Cause?

‘The problem here,’ Condoleeza Rice said, ‘is that there will always be some uncertainty about how quickly [Saddam] can acquire nuclear weapons. But we don’t want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud’. Similarly, Obama has identified nuclear terrorism as ‘a threat that rises above all others in urgency ... There is no graver danger to global security than the threat of nuclear terrorism and no more immediate task for the international community than to address that threat’. What is the probability that a terrorist cell launches a nuclear attack that destroys a city? It is not possible to calculate. Why not? Because it has never happened and thus there are no numbers to crunch. In the absence of data, all we can do is look at the facts about the construction and availability of nuclear weapons and make a judgment call.

The Gilmore Committee did just that. It started by noting that, despite the widespread fears that prevailed during the 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union did not cause the release of ex-Soviet nukes into the black market. In particular, reports that Russia’s notorious ‘suitcase nukes’ went missing did not withstand scrutiny. In any event, the devices require regular, highly technical and expensive maintenance in order to function properly. Even if some disgruntled Russian officer did manage to sell a bomb, the buyers would still have the difficult job of smuggling and detonating it – the latter being particularly difficult because nuclear devices typically have tamper-proof seals and other security measures designed to prevent precisely this scenario.

As for DIY, it’s important to emphasise that it’s simply not something that the average geek can do in the average suburban garage. ‘Building a nuclear device capable of producing mass destruction presents Herculean challenges for terrorists and indeed even for states with well-funded and sophisticated programs,’ the Gilmore Committee wrote. In the

1980s, Saddam Hussein poured Iraq's vast oil-funded resources into a nuclear program. But before the first Gulf War he failed to produce even a single weapon. Apartheid South Africa did build a small nuclear arsenal, but it took scientists and engineers –endowed with sophisticated infrastructure – four years to build their first gun-type system (the crudest form of nuclear bomb).

And yet, however unlikely and implausible it is, it could happen. What then? By most accounts, a successful nuclear detonation in an urban centre would kill in the order of 100,000 people. Given such a death toll, the chance of any randomly-selected American being killed in the explosion would be 0.033%, or 1 in 3,000. As for the collective risk, a death toll of 100,000 is not much more than the number of Americans killed each year by diabetes – 75,000 – and it is roughly equal to the number of American lives lost annually to accidents or to infections contracted in hospitals. So simply in terms of number of lives lost, a nuclear terrorist attack would certainly be tragic but not apocalyptic.

A nuclear terrorist attack would inflict massive damage, but the claim of those such as George Tenet that it would 'destroy' the American economy is an exaggeration. Again, the best disproof of Tenet's claim is the aftermath of 9-11 itself. The attack wasn't on the scale of a nuclear detonation, of course, but the terrorists did paralyse the most important city in the U.S., halt all air travel and bring American commerce and society to a shuddering halt. Stock markets plunged – but within 40 days the DJIA returned to its level on 10 September. American exports continued to rise steadily, as did the level of debt, and although the value of global trade dipped slightly in 2001 from \$8 trillion to \$7.8 trillion – it was a bad year even prior to the attacks – it increased every subsequent year to \$12 trillion in 2005. The American economy was not devastated and nor was globalisation reversed. Another demonstration of this point came on 29 August 2005, when Hurricane Katrina breached the levees protecting New Orleans. More than 1,500 people died, and most of the rest fled. The parallel with a nuclear strike is far from exact, but an American city was suddenly smashed and abandoned. The costs in economic terms have been estimated at \$80 billion. Neither the storm nor its aftermath crippled the American economy.

C. All the Groundless Fear Mongering, All the Bloody Time

Westerners' reaction to the attacks of 11 September 2001 simply does not make sense. In 2005, almost one-half of Americans worried that they or their families might be killed by terrorists – a level of concern that was actually *higher* than it was four years earlier, even though no attack occurred in the interim. And that level of concern vastly exceeds the concern about diabetes, heart disease and stroke – which are many times more likely to kill.

That people's angst was wildly unrealistic in the immediate aftermath of the attacks is understandable. But why did Americans' fear rise as time passed? To understand the reason, we must revisit 12 September 2001 and George W. Bush's declaration that the events of the previous day were 'more than acts of terror. They were acts of war ... Freedom and democracy are under attack'. Tony Blair poured his own rhetorical fuel onto the fire a few

days later: 'we know that they would, if they could, go further and use chemical or biological or even nuclear weapons of mass destruction.' This theme recast the destruction wrought by 9/11. According to our rulers, it was not an act of 19 fanatics armed with nothing more than box-cutters and good luck: it was definitive proof of the fantastic powers, reach and sophistication of the enemy.

How could it be otherwise? America, after all, is the greatest and most powerful and best country in the Entire History of the Whole Wide World; only an enemy of fantastic powers, reach and sophistication could possibly lay a hand, much less launch a successful attack, on The Indispensable Nation. A bellicose 'Triple-A nation,' to use Obama's phrase, must have Triple-A enemies: otherwise it is simply a bully. Accordingly, to confess the truth that the attacks were an act of 19 rag-tag fanatics would be to confess that America isn't exceptional; and that's something that few Americans can bring themselves to admit. Hence the interpretation of the Best and the Brightest: the attacks of 11 September 2001 were not a horrible deviation from the terrorist norm; they were a new normal – expect more attacks of the same scale – and a sign that much worse was sure to come.

The events of 9/11 could have been framed in several ways, but George W. Bush conceived them as a global clash between mighty forces that can end only in victory or destruction. 'The civilized world faces unprecedented dangers,' he declared in his State of the Union Address in January 2002. 'Unless we act to prevent it, a new wave of terrorism, potentially involving the world's most destructive weapons, looms in America's future,' the President's *National Strategy for Homeland Security* warned in 2002. 'It is a challenge as formidable as any ever faced by our nation ... Today's terrorists can strike at any place, at any time, and with virtually any weapon.' In the 2003 State of the Union address, Bush said the fight against terrorism was the latest in a succession of struggles against 'Hitlerism, militarism, and communism,' and that 'once again, this nation and all our friends are all that stand between a world of peace, and a world of chaos and constant alarm.' In 2007, the White House's web site called the 9/11 attacks 'acts of war against the United States, peaceful people throughout the world, and the very principles of liberty and human dignity.' Month after month, Bush and his administration hammered these themes.

The recurring theme of the Bush administration was that 'we' must act now to preclude the chance of terrorist strikes in the future and anyone who doubts their preferred strategy is either a defeatist or a traitor. Ron Suskind, the author of *The One Percent Doctrine: Deep Inside America's Pursuit of Its Enemies Since 9/11* traces this mentality to Bush's Vice-President Dick Cheney. According to Suskind, immediately after 11 September 2001 Cheney directed that 'if there was even a one percent chance of terrorists getting a weapon of mass destruction – and there has been a small probability of such an occurrence for some time – the United States must now act as if that were a certainty'.

Hence the rapid rise of the Terrorism Industry. Almost immediately after 11 September 2001, lobbyists and politicians recognised that a foolproof way to secure legislative and executive approval for virtually any spending proposal was to assert that it was a necessary condition of national security. In *Doublespeak and the War on Terrorism*, Timothy Lynch

cites examples of this 'security'. Among the most notable are \$250,000 for air-conditioned rubbish trucks in Newark, New Jersey and \$900,000 for the ferries in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. Its harbourmaster sheepishly admitted 'I don't know what we're going to do, but you don't turn down grant money'. Non-Governmental Organisations have also used terrorism to push their sectional barrows. Greenpeace and other foes of nuclear energy warned that terrorists could attack existing reactors, and that the construction of new ones would increase the risk that fissionable material fell into the hands of terrorists. Not to be upstaged, the Worldwatch Institute campaigned against Big Agriculture on the grounds that terrorists could infiltrate it.²⁹

III. THE SCORE AFTER A DECADE: AL QAEDA - 5, WESTERN DEMOCRACIES - 1

'Terrorism,' writes Brian Michael Jenkins, 'is actual or threatened violence calculated to create an atmosphere of fear or alarm, which will in turn cause people to exaggerate the strength of the terrorists and the threat they pose'. Yet terrorists are clearly *not* formidable foes. If they were, they'd use formidable means. It is precisely their weakness that leads them to the slaughter of innocents – which is one of the very few means available to them. Slaughter *per se* is highly unlikely to inflict a serious – never mind a mortal – blow upon their enemies. But it can and often does generate great fear, particularly when Western governments move heaven and earth in order to fan it; and fear, in turn, can trigger the (over)reactions that, terrorists hope, will advance their cause. First and foremost among these overreactions are the War on Terror, the invasions of other lands and draconian restrictions of civil liberties in the name of national security.

In that sense, George W. Bush fell hook, line and sinker into the trap which Osama bin Laden set. The inescapable truth is that during the past decade al-Qaeda has been spectacularly successful. Osama bin Laden anticipated that the attacks on 11 September 2001 would either lead to an American withdrawal from the Muslim world or an American invasion of a Muslim country. If the American military abandoned the Middle East, then its client-states – such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia – would be fatally weakened. If the American military invaded a Muslim country, then it would confirm bin Laden's claim that the 'crusader nations' were attacking Islam. It would also allow him to do to the U.S. and its allies what he did to the Soviet Union in the 1980s – that is, bleed it militarily and economically. From his point of view, the attacks on 11 September 2001 were therefore a no-lose proposition.

In the 1990s, bin Laden grandiosely 'declared war' on the U.S., but Bill Clinton wisely ignored him. After he bombed American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and attacked an American ship off the coast of the Arabian Peninsula, Osama's profile rose somewhat, but he had nowhere near the notoriety he required in order to become the unifying voice of fanatical Muslims who wished to eradicate their corrupt governments and fantasise

29 See, e.g., 'The Bioterror in Your Burger', Retrieved from <<http://www.alkalizeforhealth.net/Lbioterror.htm>>.

about a new caliphate. When Bush declared that Osama was an existential threat to the U.S., he gave Osama exactly the renown he craved. In the 1970s, the German government refused to let the Red Brigades goad it into an overreaction; after 11 September 2001, the U.S. Government delivered overreaction on a massive scale that surely exceeded bin Laden's and al-Qaeda's wildest fantasies.

Consider this passage from *The Daily Telegraph*:

The total cost to America of its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, plus the related military operations in Pakistan, is set to exceed \$4 trillion – more than three times the sum so far authorised by Congress in the decade since the 9/11 attacks. This staggering sum emerges from a new study by academics at the Ivy- league Brown University that reveals the \$1.3 trillion officially appropriated on Capitol Hill is the tip of a spending iceberg. If other Pentagon outlays, interest payments on money borrowed to finance the wars, and the \$400 billion estimated to have been spent on the domestic 'war on terror', the total cost is already somewhere between \$2.3 and \$2.7 trillion.

And even though the wars are now winding down, add in future military spending and above all the cost of looking after veterans, disabled and otherwise and the total bill will be somewhere between \$3.7 trillion and \$4.4 trillion ... Unlike most of America's previous conflicts, Iraq and Afghanistan have been financed almost entirely by borrowed money that sooner or later must be repaid.

The human misery is commensurate. The report concludes that in all, between 225,000 and 258,000 people have died as a result of the wars. Of that total, US soldiers killed on the battlefield represent a small fraction, some 6,100. The civilian death toll in Iraq is put at 125,000 (rather less than some other estimates) and at up to 14,000 in Afghanistan. For Pakistan, no reliable calculation can be made.³⁰

How has al-Qaeda's strategy fared during the past decade? How has the U.S. Government's? Consider in this light the points mentioned earlier:

1. Al-Qaeda has successfully provoked the United States and its allies into the invasion of Muslim nations. Preliminary score: al-Qaeda 2 (one point each for Afghanistan and Iraq), U.S. 0.
2. Al-Qaeda has successfully incited local resistance to the occupying forces. Preliminary score: al-Qaeda 4 (one point each for Afghanistan and Iraq), U.S. 0.
3. Al-Qaeda has successfully expanded these conflicts to neighbouring countries, and engaged the U.S. in long and widespread wars of attrition. Preliminary score:

³⁰ London, 8 July 2011.

al-Qaeda 5 (one point for Pakistan), U.S. 0.

4. Al-Qaeda has morphed into an ideology and set of operating principles that can be loosely franchised in other countries such as Yemen and Somalia without requiring direct command and control; and via these franchises incites attacks against the U.S. and countries allied to it until they withdraw from the conflict. Preliminary score: al-Qaeda 5 (no points – yet – for this criterion), U.S. 1 (let us give them the benefit of the doubt so that we avoid a whitewash).

5. Al-Qaeda has bled the U.S. economy and those of its allied nations. Will they collapse partly under the strain of too many military engagements in too many places? Preliminary score: al-Qaeda 5 (no additional points – yet), U.S. 1.

Each anniversary of the attacks of 11 September 2001 is a time to reflect, mourn, forgive and ask forgiveness. For the sake of their own sanity, Westerns should forgive the fanatics who planned and launched the attacks on 11 September 2001. Westerners must also beg forgiveness for the meddling of Western political and military fanatics in Muslim lands, ranging from Iran and Saudi Arabia in the 1940s to virtually the entire Arab world today.