The Third World War?

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As rescue workers moved into the rubble of the World Trade Center and the damaged Pentagon on 11 September 2001, the United States declared itself to be at war with terrorism. The terrorists in question soon claimed that the American campaign was really directed against Islam. Both described the conflict in terms that suggested that the future of the international system was at stake; the responses of their respective allies and supporters confirmed this. On this basis, the campaign could be properly described as a world war. Yet the offensive had been taken by a network of political activists headquartered in one of the world's most wretched countries, and directed against the world's most powerful. When the US counter-attack was launched on 7 October, it took the form of a modest American air campaign designed to the influence the outcome of a protracted struggle for power in Afghanistan. Seen in this light, it was barely more than a skirmish in the Third World.

The label for this war has yet to be decided. The Thirty Years War was not proclaimed as such when it began in 1618. Both the American War of Independence and the Civil War would have been remembered differently had the other side won. The Great War only became the First World War because there was a sequel, which is what it had been supposed to prevent. This led to the assumption that world wars came as a series, as Afghan Wars had once come to the British Empire, so that any Third World War would be an exaggerated and even more violent extension of the first two. A skirmish in the Third World hardly fits this pattern, and it would still not do so even if al-Qaeda were able to rise to the challenge and reach new heights of terroristic depravity.

The sharp contrast between high political stakes and low military means gives this war its particular quality, but at the international system's current stage of development, it is neither paradoxical nor anomalous. I argued in 1998 that there was not so much a 'revolution in military affairs' underway as one in strategic affairs, precisely because of the contrast between the impact of new technologies on concepts of conventional warfare, and the types of war being thrown up by the continuing political upheavals of a post-imperial age. One pointed to a climacteric, capital-intensive, high-technology, militarily-decisive contest for political dominance between major powers. The other

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pointed to a localised, labour-intensive, socially devastating, protracted struggle which gained international significance only to the extent that the major powers chose to take an interest.[1]

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has been ready to fight the first type of war, which for that reason alone became even less likely to occur, but has dithered about how much it wishes to get involved in the second type, which for that reason has occurred more often. If this current war turns out to have some long-term importance, and can begin to justify the designation of a third world war, it will be because it has provided a focal point for many of the disparate conflicts of the post-imperial age. In this case, it will determine the extent to which the United States accepts that it has a leading role to play in the overall management and resolution of these conflicts rather than confine itself to some specific commitments left over from its past wars.

At War With Terrorism

The severity of the human, material and economic pain caused by the 11 September attacks – and their sophistication, audacity, ruthlessness and scale – focused attention on the terrorist methodology of the al-Qaeda network, with Osama bin Laden at its head. The terrorism theme was reinforced by a subsequent attack using anthrax, directed against a few political leaders and media outlets. These had considerable and possibly unintended collateral effects. As the spores were delivered by mail, some seeped out, contaminating facilities of the US postal service and other letters. Although the casualties remain few, the disruption to American life has been substantial, and they had the effect of exposing US vulnerabilities to a much wider range of terrorist attacks using biological or chemical agents. There appears to be no link between those responsible for hijacking aircraft and turning them into guided missiles, and the despatch of anthrax – the combination of the two reinforced the view that the prime contemporary security challenge comes from terrorism.[2] From the start, President George W. Bush asserted that the enemy in this war was 'terrorism'.

Declaring a war against terrorism is warranted to the extent that there is a normative element in any war, so that success should confirm that certain types of behaviour are unacceptable and that the perpetrators can expect to see their efforts thwarted and eventually punished. The problem with the designation is that it takes the war beyond the immediate cause and raises questions of what is to be included and excluded. Many acts can be described as 'terrorism' and they might be undertaken in the name of many causes. There are also political implications in damning a cause solely by reference to the methods used by some of its proponents, or for that matter favouring the conventionally strong simply because they are in a position to eschew such methods.

'Our war on terror begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there', asserted President Bush, addressing Congress on 20 September. 'It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped or defeated'.[3] This makes the distance over which the attack is mounted the critical feature, thus playing down motives and actual effect, and reinforcing the criticism that the real priority is terrorists who can hit the US homeland. At the

same time, Bush's statement risked setting an almost unlimited challenge, and later allegations of contradiction should the US fail to take on other states accused of state-sponsored terrorism, notably Iraq, and begin to court others, such as Iran and Syria, that had denounced the 11 September outrages. Wars are fought between opposing political entities and not against tactics.

Al-Qaeda does not claim to be fighting a war for terrorism, but one that pits true Islam against Christianity and Judaism, in terms that echo Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilisations'.[4] President Bush, along with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, put in a considerable effort to deny this claim, correctly asserting that Osama bin Laden does not speak for Islam. However, speaking for Islam is bin Laden's objective, so this *is* a war about the future of Islam, and therefore about the governance of all states with Muslim populations, and all conflicts in which Muslim groups are directly involved. These conflicts occupy much of the current international agenda, taking in the Middle East, the Gulf, the Balkans, Central and East Asia, and parts of Africa. North American and West European countries have large Muslim populations, many drawn from these troubled regions, and the current conflict has highlighted the sensitive position of these communities, especially as members of the al-Qaeda network hid themselves within them as they planned and mounted operations. According to al-Qaeda and its ideological fellow travellers, the United States has become a target because it is an overweening, hegemonic and profoundly decadent power, and from this position has acted internationally on behalf of the enemies of Islam or apostates.[5] Afghanistan has provided al-Qaeda's base, because many of its activists learned their trade during the war against Soviet occupation and because of the coincidence of interests and coordination of efforts with the Taliban regime.

Osama bin Laden's claim that only Afghanistan under the Taliban was a true Islamic country highlighted his challenge to the legitimacy of the Saudi Arabian and Egyptian governments, and the vulnerability of Pakistan.[6] If only the US could be persuaded to disengage, then Iraq would recover its strength and Israel could be vanquished. The involvement of Muslim communities in so many contemporary conflicts and the importance of American policies, active and passive, to their course and eventual resolution, meant that they were all given added salience.

This was all very different from the third world war that, in prospect, had dominated strategic discourse throughout the Cold War period. This assumed the same cast of great powers that had dominated the international system since the start of the twentieth century. Having rationalised themselves into two grand coalitions, each disposing of unlimited destructive power, they would clash in the ultimate confrontation. In the event, instead of the remorseless logic of power politics working itself through to this grim conclusion, those involved balked at the prospect, and the underlying conflict was resolved as a result of the internal ideological demise of one of the coalitions in 1989. From this point, international politics began to be dominated by conflicts that could be traced to a century of falling empires, which culminated with the collapse of the Soviet Empire in Europe, and the

implosion of multinational states hitherto bound together by communism. All the struggles upon which al-Qaeda had fed were by-products of the processes of decolonisation, set in motion by previous world wars, and the creation of numerous new states, many of which turned out to be extremely weak and conflict-ridden. The chaotic ends to the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires after the First World War can still be felt in the Balkans and the Persian Gulf. The conflicts in Kashmir and the Arab–Israeli dispute began as Britain retreated after the Second World War from the most controversial parts of its empire. The turmoil in Central Asia results from the last acts of the Cold War and the sudden collapse of Soviet power.

In contrast to great-power conflicts, which naturally spread to take in allies and clients, these weak-state conflicts might have been expected to remain contained in their scope and effects. That is how they have been treated by the Western world and the UN: as subjects for individual acts of intervention and conflict-resolution. Tests have been established for inter–vention, to be applied on a case-by-case basis. Yet during the 1960s, the US had no trouble claiming that a series of discrete counter-insurgency campaigns, waged within individual states, were part of an international struggle against communism. Then the links were identified through a Cold War filter, often at the risk of obscuring the distinctive features of individual conflicts and the more parochial motives of many of the participants.

Now the links have been identified by the enemies of the United States, and while the individual conflicts still have their critical distinctive features, a global struggle of sorts is emerging as a common factor. President Bush has shown himself ready to take up the challenge. Speaking in November to leaders from the states of Central and Eastern Europe, he linked this war quite explicitly to the great ideological challenges of the past:

> Like the fascists and totalitarians before them, these terrorists – al Qaeda, the Taliban regime that supports them, and other terrorist groups across our world – try to impose their radical views through threats and violence. We see the same intolerance of dissent, the same mad, global ambitions: the same brutal determination to control every life and all of life.[7]

In this way, an alternative third world war could be constructed as an armed struggle underway for high political stakes and with global ramifications. It follows both a line of development from the previous two world wars, and a pattern they established, in which the core confrontation acts as a vortex, drawing in these other conflicts and in the process transforming their characters. In such circumstances, active engagement and even military intervention in Third World conflicts ceases to be a matter of choice and becomes a strategic imperative.

Symmetrical And Asymmetrical Wars

To use the now-familiar terminology, while a third world war as previously envisaged would have been the ultimate in destructive symmetry, the war now being conducted is completely asymmetrical. The ideal type of a

symmetrical war involves two belligerents of similar capabilities, with the outcome determined by the creation of a decisive advantage through superior training, tactical prowess, strategic imagination, technical innovation and mobilisation of national resources during the course of the war. If the symmetry runs deep enough, the victor is likely to emerge only through attrition, when mutual destructiveness has reached a point where small margins of staying power can make the difference. In the classic model for a third world war, the possibility of something that might count as a victory relied upon either a technological breakthrough achieved during the course of an arms race or else a greater capacity for risk taking, so that when matters came to a head it was the enemy's nerve that collapsed first. Whether mutual destruction really was so assured, and post-nuclear attack recovery so unlikely, became a matter of controversy, and deterrence relied upon a residual possibility that under certain circumstances, and despite the evident irrationality of the exercise, a nuclear war might nonetheless be waged. Regardless, the consequences of a superpower war were so obviously dire that every effort was made to prevent it occurring and the danger eventually passed with the end of the Cold War.

The Second World War started for the United States with a surprise attack, and the likelihood that the third might also start in such a fashion was a commonplace of American strategic literature throughout the Cold War, as was the possibility that the surprise would be directed against one or more major cities, almost certainly including New York and Washington. The links with these earlier nightmares could be found in the dust cloud ascending above Manhattan on 11 September and the designation of the World Trade Center site as 'ground zero', a term first used by those measuring the possible effects of nuclear explosions.[8] The anthrax attack in itself hardly constituted an act of 'mass destruction', although its impact demonstrated how even a small attack could have a 'mass effect' by raising fears about a more substantial biological attack. Warnings about al-Qaeda's eagerness to gain access to means of mass destruction, and its lack of qualms about using them, soon became a prominent theme of statements by coalition leaders.[9] After the Taliban had evacuated Kabul, evidence was found of interest in nuclear and biological devices.[10] Osama bin Laden was ready to encourage this view of his group's capabilities.[11]

In most respects, however, the striking feature of this alternative third world war was its almost complete asymmetry. The ideal type of an asymmetrical war is of two belligerents of quite different capabilities with the outcome determined by one side's superior ability to find counters to the capabilities of the other. In this case, the remaining superpower, with superiority in every form of military capability, finds itself pitted against a non-state entity of modest means. The US had hoped to achieve an invincible position through the full exploitation of the proclaimed 'revolution in military affairs', so that its wars would henceforth be those of the 'third wave', dependent on the artefacts of the information economy, as the wars of earlier periods depended upon the artefacts of the first, agricultural wave and the second, industrial wave.[12]

Instead the United States found itself contemplating exactly the opposite of the sort of war it wanted to fight, against an enemy able to find sanctuary by merging into a mountainous and inaccessible terrain for defensive purposes and possessing the ability to merge with global civil society to mount attacks against enemy assets, including in its homeland. The extremity of its weakness in conventional military terms is matched by the extremity of its dependence on terrorism. Low technology was used to turn the West's own high technology against itself. The box cutters used to capture the hijacked aircraft served as advanced versions of the knife, the weapon of choice for street brawlers throughout the centuries. Estimates for the direct cost of the 11 September operations suggest $100,000. For this outlay, al-Qaeda was able to impose immediate costs at least a million times higher, accelerate an international economic downturn, with airlines and tourism particularly shaken, and generate a requirement for massive additional expenditure on internal security – as well as on the subsequent military operations to close down the threat. This was in addition to severe human costs.

Al-Qaeda's readiness to take the initiative, and accept the certain death of its own militants in operations, meant that the US government found itself pondering how to defend a country where millions of people live and work close together in dense urban conurbations, reliant on complex and sophisticated systems of energy, transportation and communication. When the tactical objective is to kill large numbers of people in spectacular fashion and cause panic and disruption, the United States constitutes a 'target-rich environment', with many choices even if individual buildings and facilities turn out to be well protected. The choice of targets did not have to be confined to the homeland United States.

When the US responded with its standard coercive air campaign, the minimal results it achieved during the first month reinforced the image of a great power disoriented by a tiny power offering few 'strategic' targets worth hitting, but still able to exploit every stray 'precision' weapon that hit a civilian site to maintain the propaganda offensive. Columnist Maureen Dowd captured the frustration: 'We're sophisticated; they're crude. We're millennial; they're medieval. We ride B-52s; they ride horses. And yet they're outmaneuvering us'.[13] A nation that invented the art of public relations and dominated the world media was being bested by a group that communicated only through melodramatic statements despatched from a country that banned television. Nik Gowing, noting the challenge to 'the complacent assumption of information supremacy', observed how 'Low-cost video cameras and mobile phones can nimbly upstage billion-dollar information-processing systems and hierarchical command-and-control structures'.[14] When the strategy shifted to supporting local allies on the ground, key supplies turned out to be horse-feed. Many of the tactics and weapons employed would not have been out of place in the imperial wars of the nineteenth century and indeed, in their reliance on betrayal and defection, in much earlier times.

US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had been anxious to explain from the start that this was going to be a new type of war, 'like none other our nation has faced'.[15] Yet, while this war had many unique qualities, in many respects it

was quite familiar. The core issues were those that have had to be addressed in countless civil conflicts over the past half-century in which insurgent groups have sought to undermine the foundations of an established state. Terrorism is an obvious tactic for the weak to employ against the strong. Instead of taking on directly the military and police organisations responsible for protecting the states they wish to challenge, the weak seek to circumvent them by attacking the more vulnerable elements of civil society.[16] This can cover a wide range of activities, from the assassination of senior political figures to indiscriminate assaults against civilians, with or without warning, to the sabotage of critical infrastructure. Unlike traditional armies, guerrilla groups and terrorists do not expect to hold territory. They need time more than space, for it is their ability to endure while mounting regular attacks that enables them to grow while the enemy is drained of patience and credibility. As with more conventional military action, success must be marked by the creation of desired political effects and this will depend on such factors as the ambition of the objective, the capacity to sustain a campaign rather than mount isolated incidents, the balance of popular support and the ability to shift this balance through successful operations.

If there is a model for al-Qaeda's campaign, it is the old anarchist notion of the 'propaganda of the deed'.[17] This notion justified acts of terrorism (usually assassinations) as a means of undermining the old order by demonstrating that those who claimed to be all-powerful were in fact vulnerable. Dramatic deeds would cause the ruling classes to lose their nerve while at the same time inspiring the masses. Part of this strategy assumed that the ruling classes would lash out to preserve their position. In the process, so the theory went, they would diminish themselves further. Every punitive attack would open the eyes of the masses and feed their clamour for justice and an end to oppression. The global scope of the media meant that the 'deed' of 11 September had the largest-ever audience for a deliberate act of war. The political impact of this, and the images resulting from the subsequent unfolding drama, would be felt in all those individual conflicts that al-Qaeda is seeking to influence.

The weak can only defeat the strong if they can survive sufficiently to mount hurtful campaigns, thereby turning latent and inchoate support into a political movement that cannot be turned off by military or other coercive means. This sets the terms for the response of the strong.

The New World Order And US Defence Policy

The origins of al-Qaeda can be traced back to the *mujahedeen* campaign against the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, which turned into a Western-sponsored training ground for Islamic fighters. The alumni of the Afghan campaign spread not only through Central Asia and into the Middle East, but also into Europe (Bosnia and Kosovo) and to East Asia (Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia). Although the propaganda continues to highlight the support given by the United States to Israel, and in terms of international support among Muslim communities this is undoubtedly important, the critical trigger appears to have been the coalition between the United States and the conservative Gulf states

following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. More than anything else, Osama bin Laden has complained about the introduction of American forces into his homeland of Saudi Arabia, close to Islam's holiest sites.

The Gulf conflict also shaped the Western approach to international affairs after the Cold War era. At first, President Bush senior heralded this approach as a 'New World Order', but this was largely in terms of the new understanding between Moscow and Washington allowing the United Nations Security Council to work at last as originally intended.[18] The Iraqi invasion could be condemned as a violation of one of the core norms of international order – non-aggression – and building the coalition to liberate Kuwait required honouring the other core norm of non-interference in internal affairs. Later there were regrets that out of respect for this norm the United States had not finished off Saddam Hussein's regime. At the time, the practical difficulties of a march on Baghdad and the associated geo-political risks all reinforced the norm.

This rather traditional approach to foreign policy continued after the Gulf War. Processes of political change were not to be initiated or completed through military means. The slogans of globalisation made it possible to envisage a more peaceful world developing as part of a natural progression. The defeat of state socialism in the Cold War left liberal capitalism as the dominant economic model. With free markets came the movement of people and ideas. Closed states would be opened up by the needs of commerce and the imperatives of the information age. More states would be obliged to become more democratic and, if international relations theory was to be believed, more peaceable in their relations with each other.

This optimistic view was at variance with news from the Third World of corruption and poor governance, inter-communal strife and mass distress, along with crashing 'emerging markets' – to the point where gloomier commentators were prepared to paint a picture of a 'coming anarchy' marked by 'the withering away of central governments, the rise of tribal and regional domains, the unchecked spread of disease, and the growing pervasiveness of war'.[19] Whatever might be achieved in terms of political and economic measures, the United States appeared still to believe that there were few military measures that it could usefully take to calm Third World turbulence. The reason for this was the difficulties experienced whenever it had tried to intervene. Reflecting on this experience, particularly in Vietnam and then later in the Lebanon, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger in November 1984 concluded that the key was maintaining the support of public opinion. This argued against attempting to take on wars that would be protracted, complex and indecisive.[20] This suggested that the US could choose its wars, leading to Secretary of State George Shultz's caustic observation that foreign policy required more than a readiness only to fight the 'fun wars'. Colin Powell, who had worked with Weinberger as Reagan's National Security Advisor and later went on to be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under George Bush senior and Bill Clinton, was conscious of the danger of being seen to rule out completely more ambiguous contingencies, but he still followed the broad and largely negative thrust of the Weinberger doctrine.

American military power was best employed in an overwhelming manner to achieve clearly defined objectives with both speed and minimum casualties. Any scenario that threatened another quagmire and had murky purposes was best avoided, and certainly never entered into without a strategy for getting out.[21] Out of this came the critical distinction between 'war', defined in terms of 'large-scale combat operations', and 'operations other than war', which included shows of force, operations for purposes of peace enforcement and peacekeeping, and counter-terrorism and counterinsurgency.[22] For the rest of the decade this distinction was under regular challenge, as the Clinton administration discovered a variety of reasons why armed force might have to be used, the difficulties of always insisting on an exit strategy and just how war-like 'operations other than war' could seem.

Through this period the Pentagon preferred to focus on proper wars and the old world order problems of countering aggression. The end of the Cold War meant that countering aggression in Europe was no longer a problem, but the durability of communist regimes in Asia required staying ready to honour commitments to South Korea and, more ambiguously, Taiwan. With conservative Gulf states upgraded to allies after 1991, the continuing containment of Iraq became an additional commitment. These were eventually formalised into the 'two-major-wars' standard for defence policy, whereby at any given time the US should be able to cope with aggressive action by both Iraq and North Korea.[23]

Conceiving of its most likely wars in classical terms allowed the US military establishment to continue to think in terms of the strategy that had proved so successful during *Operation Desert Storm*, and which summed up the trends in US military planning since the Vietnam debacle. After Vietnam, US military thinking reverted to the sort of campaign with which it was most comfortable, and which had been validated during the Second World War, based on technically superior, skilfully orchestrated and highly mobile firepower geared to eliminating the opposing force. The revival of this approach was marked by the adoption of the doctrine of AirLand Battle in 1982. This was intended from the start to set broad principles for any war and not just NATO's central front, with a renewed emphasis on manoeuvre after a past preoccupation with attrition, so that the battlefield was seen in the round, and the critical attributes of successful operations were stressed as 'initiative, depth, agility and sychronisation.'[24] The belief that all substantial wars could be fought in this way was reinforced by the misinterpretation of the Vietnam War by Colonel Harry Summers, who had worked backwards from its conventional military conclusion to deny its origins as a traditional guerrilla campaign.[25] So by 1986 the *Field Manual 90-8 Counterguerrilla Operations*, dealing with action directed against armed anti-government forces, was claiming that the 'basic concept of Air Land Battle doctrine can be applied to Counterguerrilla operations'.[26]

The influence of AirLand battle could be seen in the Gulf War. Extra–polating from this success led to the affirmation of the 'revolution in military affairs' riding on a technological dynamic that promised the domination of the information

environment and thereby the battlespace. Prior to 11 September, the Bush administration had taken up this theme. Thus in May 2001, the second President Bush asserted a preference for a 'future force that is defined less by size and more by mobility and swiftness, one that relies more heavily on stealth, precision weaponry and information technologies'.[27]

If this trend could be pushed far enough, then it was possible at some point to envisage a war without tears, conducted over long distances with great precision with as few people as possible – preferably none at all – at risk. The objective was to reduce the role in war-fighting of anything recognisably approaching 'battle'. The ideal is one-sided and highly focused engagements geared to what has been described as the enemy's 'centre of gravity', which can be taken to refer to the weakest spot in the enemy's politico-military system.

The very success of *Operation Desert Storm*, however, made it less likely that future enemies would fight in a way that so conformed to American preferences: accepting a conventional battlefield where they would be comprehensively destroyed by superpower firepower. There had been a sense of discovery about the Gulf War, not least in the improvement in US military prowess since Vietnam or indeed since the various mishaps of the 1980s, starting with the failed rescue bid of the Iranian hostages in April 1980 and moving on to the ignominious retreat from Beirut. Out of this came the notion of asymmetric warfare, which offered 'centre-of-gravity' reasoning in reverse – what might be done to the United States and other Western states to cause them to lose their equilibrium?

Forms Of Asymmetry

The idea of asymmetrical conflict has been around since the 1970s, as a reflection of the Vietnam experience.[28] The first explicit mention of the concept in a Pentagon document was in the 1995 Joint Doctrine, in a reference to engagements between dissimilar forces. By the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review, it was observed that 'US dominance in the conventional military arena may encourage adversaries to use … asymmetric means to attack our interests overseas and Americans at home'.[29] The basic frustration with this approach was summed up by a 1998 report from the National Defense University that characterised asymmetry as not 'fighting fair'. Moreover as it moved into the policy debate, the inclination was to develop a generic concept. Thus the 1999 Joint Strategy Review defined asymmetric approaches as those that attempted 'to circumvent or undermine US strengths while exploiting US weaknesses using methods that differ significantly from the United States' expected method of operations'. These could be applied 'at all levels of warfare – strategic, operational, land tactical – and across the spectrum of military operations'. Put this way, the approach becomes synonymous with any sound strategy for fighting the United States and loses any specificity. Moreover, it encourages the analysis to start with an appreciation of US vulnerabilities which is likely to reflect the concerns of the moment (information warfare against critical infrastructure, weapons of mass destruction) rather than the opponent's mind-set. Thus the critical planning document, Joint Vision 2020 – unlike its 1995

predecessor, Joint Vision 2010 – did address the problem, but used as a key example the threat of long-range ballistic missiles.[30] More recently, it has been argued – quite logically – that asymmetry works both ways and that the US use of long-range precision weapons is a good example of asymmetric warfare. So gradually, the concept has been deprived of useful meaning.

If we stick with the simpler, original concept, then we can note that, by definition, the weak have to employ asymmetrical methods against the strong, and the methods chosen will depend on the weak's analysis of the strong's vulnerabilities. The official treatment of the concept of asymmetry indicates the extent to which it has come to reflect more a domestic debate on vulnerabilities than an analysis of the plans and intentions of potential adversaries, although it remains entirely possible that this debate will put ideas into the heads of the adversaries. 'Third wave' thinking, for example, encouraged a focus on information systems, not only in making possible immaculately coordinated precision strikes over long distances in the military sphere, but in the even more remarkable transformations underway in the civilian sphere. As society's critical infrastructure became more dependent upon information technologies, new targets were offered to the wily opponents. In a culture that had assumed that the best military strategies were those that caused the minimum casualties, the thought that an enemy would aim for the support systems of modern societies was both comforting and alarming at the same time.[31] The direct hurt would be slight while the indirect hurt as transportation, banking and public health systems began to break down could be substantial. An enemy able to mobilise an army of software wizards could subvert, by the most insidious electronic means, an advanced society. The frequency with which companies and even high-profile networks, such as that of the US military, were attacked by a variety of hackers gave this threat added credibility. But much of this was 'hacktivism', a way of making political or cultural points rather than threatening the economy or social cohesion. Even if more determined adversaries were prepared to try something more substantial, the result was likely to be 'mass disruption' rather than 'mass destruction', with inconvenience and disorientation more evident than terror and collapse.[32]

A further sense of how societal changes might have created new vulnerabilities came with the view that advanced Western countries had entered a 'post-heroic' phase, leading to an increasing reluctance to put the young generation at risk in war, even with all-volunteer forces.[33] Such a view turns a contingent response into a secular trend. It is one that has nonetheless been implicit in the main lesson drawn from Vietnam, and confirmed by the experience of the Lebanon in the 1980s and Somalia in the 1990s – that the US has such a low tolerance of casualties that it will abandon campaigns that it might otherwise have won to avoid severe losses. The strength of this presumption was illustrated in the US Army's 1993 *Field Manual 100-5 Operations*:

> The American people expect decisive victory and abhor unnecessary casualties. They prefer quick resolution of conflicts and reserve the right to reconsider their support should any of these conditions not be met.[34]

The result has been what Jeffrey Record has described as 'force-protection fetishism'. As a result of this fetish, lack of loss – not mission accomplishment – becomes the standard for judging an operational success. The 1999 Kosovo War demonstrated the impact of this concern, and despite the consequences it had for mission accomplishment, in terms of relieving the developing humanitarian catastrophe, this fetish was considered to have been validated. The 'paramount lesson learned from *Operation Allied Force*', as identified by Secretary of Defense William Cohen and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Henry Shelton, was that 'the well being of our people must remain our first priority'. As a US Army brigade moved into Kosovo as part of the force intended to bring some calm to the country after the war, its mission statement listed as its first priority 'self-protection' with the 'peacekeeping tasks' secondary. While the troops of US allies intermingled with the local population, US troops stayed in a guarded and well-appointed compound, separated from the society that they were supposed to help calm.[35]

Substantial evidence now suggests that the American people are far more robust than their leaders give them credit for. Accumulating casualties necessarily raise questions about the wisdom of a particular campaign, but if decent answers are forthcoming then so is continued political support.[36] Most remarkable in this respect are the results of a study carried out in 1999 by the Triangle Institute of Security Studies (TISS) that demonstrated even with a case where it would be assumed that casualty tolerance would be close to zero – action to stabilise a democratic govern–ment in the Congo – the public was not only prepared to accept quite high levels of combat deaths, but these levels were significantly higher than those accepted by the civilian élite, and even more so than the military élite. This leads to the bizarre conclusion that senior military officers have become more casualty-averse than the average American citizen.[37] The notion of casualty intolerance has become so internalised that military and political leaders are loath to put it to the test.

Even when consideration was given to a more traditional and alarming form of asymmetry – an attack on the US homeland using weapons of mass destruction (better described as weapons of 'mass effect') or lesser forms of terrorism – the analysis tended to be constrained by the established policy framework. For example, prior to 11 September 2001, the most important policy issue appeared to be a requirement to build a missile defence, potentially an extremely expensive counter to low-probability attacks. Iraq and North Korea have been identified as the most likely 'rogue states' capable of both developing and actually using long-range missiles against the US homeland. These were also the two countries that provided the 'two-countries standard', and so the case for a moderate missile-defence system to deal with this particular asymmetric threat flowed logically from the established scenarios that already guided military planning.[38] As if to emphasise this point, as well as make a case for abandoning the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, the Bush administration went out of its way to assert the irrelevance of missile defence to relations with Russia.

The assumption that the worst type of asymmetric threat would be based on chemical, biological or nuclear weapons also shaped the debate on 'superterrorism'. The subject of homeland defence had become a matter for intense scrutiny, especially in the light of some of the more notorious terrorist incidents of the 1990s: the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993; the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995; and the bombing of US embassies in East Africa in 1998. Up to 11 September, the worst that terrorists seemed able to accomplish with conventional explosives alone had been casualties in the low hundreds. Although, in popular fiction and policy analysis, there was an awareness of the possibility that terrorists might be able to cause thousands of casualties using readily accessible instruments, including hijacked aircraft, the basic anxiety developed in official and unofficial reports was that weapons of mass effect might be employed.[39]

Analysis suggested a sharp distinction. 'Normal' terrorism, relying on conventional explosives, would be capable of causing casualties in the low hundreds, of which the worst example was the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie in Scotland which killed 278 people. This could be the responsibility of terrorists representing a non-state group or a state sponsor. 'Superterrorism', relying on chemical and biological, or even nuclear, weapons, would cause casualties in the low thousands and upwards. This would probably only be within the capacity of a state.

Such superterrorism would have severe consequences but it would also have a low probability, and the sceptics argued that it made more sense to concentrate on the higher-probability events. Weapons of mass destruction did not appear to be the weapons of choice for terrorists and they would probably have problems handling them. Assuming that the terrorists had clear strategic purpose, their interest would be, as Brian Jenkins put it in an early study, in getting 'a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead'.[40] Despite the fear of mass terrorism, incidents in which this was close to being achieved remained comparatively rare, so that by 2000 it was being noted, even by some of those who had taken this threat extremely seriously, that the 'new era … of terrorism has failed to materialise'.[41] Following the Oklahoma City bombing, mass-casualty terrorism appeared as a domestic as much as an international problem.[42]

Even studies which, post-11 September, could claim to have been prescient in their warnings about the hazards of superterrorism tended to discourage a focus on al-Qaeda. Thus the Hart-Rudman Commission, which had identified 'unannounced attacks on American cities' as the gravest threat, also suggested that 'Terrorism will appeal to many weak states as an attractive, asymmetric option to blunt the influence of major powers. Hence, state-sponsored terrorist attacks are at least as likely, if not more so, than attacks by independent, unaffiliated terrorist groups'.[43] North Korea and Iraq once again appeared as likely culprits, so that the most credible form of this threat was in fact a derivative of the standard scenarios used in defence planning.

The importance of the distinction between normal and superterrorism turned out to be overstated. The view that superterrorism would largely be

the result of conspiracies hatched in a 'rogue state' and would probably emerge out of an ongoing crisis was challenged by al-Qaeda. The organisation could be characterised as non-state, with agents spread widely in many countries, yet it managed to establish its headquarters, with the connivance of the Taliban regime, in Afghanistan. This became not so much a case of state-sponsored terrorism but of a terrorist-sponsored state. Furthermore, al-Qaeda found a way to cause thousands of casualties through careful planning and training rather than technical prowess and access to noxious materials. This need not have been a surprise. It had attempted mass casualty attacks before[44] and the US had already experienced the difference that could be made when those perpetrating the attacks were prepared to commit suicide.[45]

The framework within which the danger of superterrorism was viewed reinforced established defence thinking in another respect. In an influential article, Richard Betts drew on a 1993 estimate of millions of casualties resulting from the release of anthrax spores over Washington DC. He raised the issue of whether faced with such dangers, retreat might be the best defence. 'The United States should not give up all its broader political interests, but it should tread cautiously in areas – especially the Middle East – where broader interests grate against the core imperatives of preventing mass destruction within America's borders'.[46] Thus, if superterrorism was an unwelcome by-product of an activist foreign policy, then a prudent policy would eschew too much involvement in the affairs of other states.

Interventionism

This was relevant to the developing debate over how to respond to strife in the post-imperial world. During the 1990s, it became apparent that the new world order was going to be marked by an increasing incidence of intra- rather than inter-state conflict, often in areas marked by economic failure and immature political institutions, and often demanding urgent attention because of large-scale humanitarian distress, but not necessarily because of any direct impact on vital interests. These conflicts had potential repercussions beyond their immediate locale, as refugees fled and the collapse of order encouraged the spread of criminal activity, the drugs trade and subversion. Their potential implications for western armed forces were illustrated as the Gulf War ended and rebellious Kurds were subjected once again to vicious repression. The coalition countries accepted that the internal affairs of Iraq had become their business. This resulted in a long-term commitment to Kurdish security including the northern no-fly zone over Iraq, later to be followed by a parallel concern for the Shi'ite community which led to the southern zone. There were various other reasons for limited military operations during the 1990s, including a 1993 response to evidence of a plot to assassinate the first President Bush, and a short bombing campaign (*Operation Desert Fox*) in December 1998 reflecting frustration over Saddam's refusal to comply with demands for access to the most suspicious Iraqi facilities. There was, however, no attempt to impose a new regime through force of arms.

The most important set of conflicts for developing the terms for inter–vention in the internal affairs of states behaving badly were those that resulted from the dissolution of Yugoslavia – Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo. Out of this came the new dispensation, that in exceptional circumstances major powers could ignore the norm of non-interference. But this was not the same as arguing that Western political forms should be imposed on the offending states or even those in need of post-war reconstruction.

The United States, through the 1990s, showed a scant interest in conflicts of this kind, finding them too reminiscent of Vietnam. The Clinton administration accepted that the emerging interventionist norm might have to be enforced through the application of American power, but it was clearly uneasy with this development, especially when it came to ground forces. By the end of the decade, with Kosovo the latest example, it had established a preference for confining its military operations to air power. General Wesley Clark's account of the management of the Kosovo War, from his vantage point as Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), makes clear that – as far as the Pentagon was concerned **–** the demands of this campaign would not be allowed to reduce preparedness for the planning priorities of the two-war scenario against Iraq and North Korea.[47] This attempt to limit liabilities reflected the assumption that these interventions were discretionary, that whether to get involved was a matter of choice.

So while the main US preoccupations were with states likely to aggress against US allies, a growing amount of international business appeared to involve states suffering from internal wars, in which the US had no vital interests. The former would require a robust, but conventional, military response which could achieve decisive results within a specified time, while the latter would involve irregular operations, against an enemy that could merge with its surroundings and in which the main role of armed force would be to create the conditions for a political dialogue. To the extent that the US chose to get involved in the latter type of conflict, it could so with the types of forces developed for repelling major aggression. But of course, the converse would not be true. If the US did choose to engage in such internal wars, then allies and clients could do the close combat whilst the US provided intelligence and logistics support and, possibly, air power. The allies were uncomfortable with this proposed division of labour, yet showed signs of accepting it: for example in the definition of missions for the proposed European defence force.

In 2000, the likely attitude of the incoming Bush administration was summed up by the prospective National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice:

> The president must remember that the military is a special instrument. It is lethal, and it is meant to be. It is not a civilian peace force. It is not a political referee. And it is most certainly not designed to build a civilian society. Military force is best used to support clear political goals, whether limited, such as expelling Saddam from Kuwait, or comprehensive, such as demanding the unconditional surrender of Japan and Germany during World War II.

From this she drew the conclusions that US intervention in 'humanitarian' crises would be at best 'exceedingly rare'. The criteria for getting involved were familiar: the president should ask 'whether decisive force is possible and is likely to be effective and must know how and when to get out.' Humanitarian interventions were thus largely jobs for allies.[48]

At the end of September 2001, as Washington was still mulling over how best to deal with al-Qaeda, the Pentagon published its long-awaited, latest QDR. There was only time to make some nods in the direction of the new situation, but not to change the basic policy. While there were claims that there had been a 'paradigm shift', this was not immediately evident, other than the adoption of a 'capabilities' rather than 'threat-based' approach. For planning purposes, the US still intended to 'remain capable of swiftly defeating attacks against US allies and friends in any two theatres of operation in overlapping timeframes'. It also would be necessary to 'degrade an aggressor's ability to coerce others through conventional or asymmetric means, including CBRNE [chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and enhanced high explosive] weapons'. So while references to asymmetric warfare were plentiful, this was still largely linked to the major war contingencies, serving as an argument for missile defences. It was not linked to 'small-scale contingencies' which would best be undertaken in concert with allies and friends, and by specialised units.[49]

The distinction between vital and non-vital interests is less than clear-cut. In particular, for those directly involved in these various conflicts, the most vital interests were at stake. They would therefore have the same incentives to persuade the US not to intervene by threatening large-scale casualties and even the US homeland. All the considerable discussion of asymmetric warfare and counter terrorism did not grasp the full significance of the developing response in the Islamic world to US foreign policy. It was well understood that out of this response would come acts of terrorism, and even that these would be severe, but not that the consequence of a successful attack could be a requirement that the US engage in precisely the sort of long-term operation that it had eschewed, in circumstances where force protection could not always be the highest priority.

The Conduct of Asymmetric War

The United States had taken on board the notion of asymmetric war but had geared it to the dominant scenarios that were guiding all American force planning. These still pointed to 'proper' wars between the armed forces of major powers, with far less attention being given to those lesser types, previously dismissed as being 'other than war' and now merely 'small-scale'. These were generally judged to be an inappropriate use of armed forces, apt to tie them down. US forces could become caught in vicious cross-fire while conducting largely political business that did not even touch on the nation's most vital interests. The military superiority of the United States created risks that in fighting major wars the opponents might resort to superterrorism. While there was some understanding that the lesser types might also encourage

terrorism, it seemed unlikely that this would be of the worst kind. Even after 11 September, there was concern that once bin Laden and his coterie were hiding in the Afghan mountains, they would be devilishly difficult to find. Moreover, Afghanistan was notably inhospitable to foreign armies, and finding the prey would require confronting hardened and vicious fighters.

These would be the sort of 'warriors' described by Ralph Peters, based on his observations in Central Asia, as 'erratic primitives of shifting allegiances' who preferred to 'snipe, ambush, mislead, and betray, attempting to fool the constrained soldiers confronting them into alienating the local population or allies, while otherwise hunkering down and trying to outlast the organized military forces pitted against them'.[50] Yet the use of Afghanistan as a sanctuary and the gradual integration of al-Qaeda fighters with those of the Taliban regime in their defensive operations against a much-depleted Northern Alliance, meant that al-Qaeda could not fully accept the logic of asymmetry and take to the mountains, but felt obliged to defend the land they held. Their forces were geared to a conventional battle, albeit one that at times bore more resemblance to the nineteenth than the twenty-first century, complete with cavalry charges. Nor was there much evidence that the shock of 11 September had changed the American way of warfare. The State Department put considerable effort into forging new relationships with regional powers, including Pakistan and India, but the Pentagon preferred to win the war while incurring as few obligations as possible to others. To avoid excessive dependence on any particular Afghan faction or member of the international coalition, a quick military fix was sought through strategic bombing and special-forces operations. It was hoped that this would undermine Taliban resistance and encourage defections. As the Taliban collapsed, the Americans would install a new, broad-based, UN-sponsored government into Kabul, possibly even including ex-Taliban 'moderates', while their own forces, supported only by the reliable British, would start the search for Osama bin Laden's mountain redoubt.

So, for all the talk of a new war requiring new thinking, the American default strategy of air attacks against military targets was soon in play. In October 2001, the allied air campaign against Afghanistan bore similarities to that against in Bosnia in 1995 (*Deliberate Force*) and Serbia in 1999 (*Allied Force)*, with a focus on air defences, command networks and arms dumps, and occasional 'leadership' targets. Given the scarcity of appropriate targets, the scale was smaller, but there was still the same problem of meeting pre-war promises to avoid civilian casualties. It soon became apparent after one, largely unsuccessful, commando-type raid that these required far better logistics and intelligence than available, and that the air raids, after the few genuinely important targets had been struck, were doing more harm than good. It appeared that the Afghan people were angry with the Americans because of civilian deaths, while the Taliban fighters, who had largely survived unscathed, were even more confident. If American troops came, as 'creatures of comfort', they would provide no match to fighters who had seen off much tougher Soviet soldiers.[51] Meanwhile, coalition partners were

becoming irritated by their assigned role – essentially cheerleading – and attempts to forge a new political order for Afghanistan were thwarted by a combination of traditional rivalries and uncertainty over the seriousness of the American intent.

In late October, the US resorted to a lower-risk military strategy.[52] The air campaign became focused rather than speculative and geared to land operations, with a prominent role for B-52s dropping 'dumb' bombs on the Taliban's forward positions. This required close cooperation with the Northern Alliance, putting to one side misgivings about the alliance's combat capability and the narrowness of its political base. The results were impressive. Almost as soon as the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif fell, the fighting spirit of the Taliban appeared to evaporate. A series of sharp advances by Northern Alliance troops backed by betrayals and defections, did the rest. Despite Western pleading for a more orderly progression, Kabul fell soon after and the Taliban retreated to Kandahar for a last stand. Many al-Qaeda fighters had been killed in the fighting and the conditions appeared propitious to the declared aim of 'smoking out' Osama bin Laden himself, although at the time of writing this had not been achieved.

Strategically, this was comparable to the Kosovo War when NATO ended up relying on the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) to draw out Serbian forces sufficiently so that they could be targeted by allied aircraft. As the only presence on the ground, the KLA gained a considerable political initiative, but this was limited by the speed with which NATO ground forces, which had been waiting for such a moment, moved in to fill the vacuum left by retreating Serb units. In the case of Kabul, the vacuum was filled by the Northern Alliance and, while it said the right things about the need for a broad-based government, it showed little interest in the presence of substantial foreign armies in a peace-keeping role, actively discouraging British forces who were ready to move in.

The US showed no interest in participating in a peacekeeping force, even as the risks grew that the new victors would take the opportunity to settle old scores, and that Afghanistan would fragment further into warring factions. [53] Before the start of the air strikes, the Pentagon had seemingly understood that a substantial number of ground forces might be required; however, in the event there was clear relief that they had not been necessary and that the US could chalk up, at least in its initial stage, another war virtually free of combat casualties. Nor had they become much obligated to allies, many of whom had assigned forces but there were only required for marginal roles.

A Third World War?

Might the campaign still be characterised as a third world war? That would certainly be the view of al-Qaeda, which has presented itself as a global focal point for a political movement seeking to influence and feed upon many regional conflicts involving Muslim people. It had operated militarily in areas where small numbers of well-trained and highly motivated militants can make a difference, and politically by appealing to disaffected sections of Muslim

opinion over a much wider area. Its successes, including acts of spectacular terrorism, potentially adds to its political appeal. This could be enhanced further by disproportionate Western responses, leading to the activation of many latent conflicts as well as the aggravation of those already in being.

By contrast, Western countries have not seen these various conflicts as linked but rather as separate processes, each with its own internal dynamic and characteristics, so that the international response must also vary according to the circumstances. Yet the attitude and behaviour of the leading international players, especially the United States, has a critical influence on all these conflicts, and the response to any one tends to impact upon the subsequent responses to the other. As American policy during the 1990s became one of strictly limited liabilities, then all involved, and not just radical activists, had an interest in just how strictly these liabilities would be set.

The challenge for al-Qaeda has been to sustain a campaign, demonstrating its ability to strike at American assets in a way that Washington would find both frustrating and humiliating. With every success, the 'greatness' of the United States as a global power would be diminished, and its evident inclination to disengagement reinforced. Those governments that had looked to it for support would feel increasingly vulnerable. The radicals would gradually gain the upper hand and, in the Muslim world, conservative regimes would stumble and fall. This would be guerrilla warfare on a global scale**.**

This campaign did not begin on 11 September 2001. There is now evidence that al-Qaeda provided military training to Somali tribes fighting UN forces in 1993, which then included a substantial American contingent.[54] In Somalia, the American military followed the tenets of AirLand battle, with attempts to use offensive power at the local level to produce decisive results against local militias.[55] The main target was General Aideed and this led, on 3 October 1993, to a raid on two of his lieutenants which went badly wrong. Al-Qaeda operatives participated in the subsequent engagement, which left 18 US Army Rangers dead. As warfare, this might be considered no more than a skirmish, yet politically this was a moment of great significance. Soon President Clinton had ordered *Operation Restore Hope* to be concluded, and the frequent references to 'Mogadishu' thereafter in discourse on intervention indicates just what a profound affect it had on American thinking. Later, bin Laden remarked on how those who had fought in Somalia had been surprised by the 'low spiritual morale' of the Americans. He noted how 'the largest power on earth' left 'after some resistance from powerless, poor, unarmed people'.[56] The Somali episode soon influenced other adversaries of the United States. That same October, an American ship carrying US and Canadian soldiers and flying the UN flag turned around as it was about to dock at Haiti because of the presence of a hostile crowd shouting 'Somalia! Dead American soldiers!'. The Serbs also took note of this preoccupation with the safety of US forces in their strategies.[57]

Thus, the size of a military event need not be a guide to its wider political importance. This skirmish did make a difference in the overall development of international politics. The flaw in al-Qaeda's strategy was to move beyond

hurting American forces whenever they intervened in Third World conflicts. This clearly could bring results, as Beirut and Somalia both demonstrated, and had brought about a long-term change in American military philosophy, in the form of setting strict conditions for any intervention and 'force-protection fetishism'. They wished, however, to punish the Americans for their meddling and hurt them so much that they would abandon all idea of international engagement. There is evidence that the attack on the US embassies in Africa in August 1998 was some sort of retribution for the Somali intervention, although by this time it had no immediate or obvious coercive purpose. A group which claims such a strong religious inspiration may not always conform to the model of a Western rational actor. Retribution can appear important for its own sake.

A successful asymmetric strategy requires that the weak convince the strong that it is not in their interests to persist. The higher motivation of the weak, so long as it can endure the responses of the strong, should over time work to its advantage. For this reason, it has been argued that the archetypal asymmetric actor wants to achieve a 'Mogadishu, not a Pearl Harbor'. The advantages are likely to be reduced if the strong is hurt so badly that the defeat of the weak becomes a vital interest. In a judgement that may well be validated, Kenneth McKenzie argued that 'When US national will has been mobilised, the strong will prevail'.[58] This was the response to the events of 11 September, and opinion polls were soon recording an unreservedly robust national response and a readiness to do whatever necessary to defeat those responsible.[59]

While it would be wrong to exaggerate what might be achieved if the al-Qaeda presence in Afghanistan is obliterated, it would also be wrong to overstate the ease with which its activities can be transferred to another country or left dependent upon a loosely connected network of activists. The successful campaign in Afghanistan should puncture the aura surrounding al-Qaeda. Wholly eradicating this political force may still be an unreal objective, for the beliefs that animate it are deeply and widely held; but it can be frustrated and demoralised. If, on the other hand, the current US campaign fails to break al-Qaeda, or future targets such as Iraq prove to be more resistant, disengagement from global politics and a retreat into a 'Fortress America' posture may well be perceived by both the American government and people as the only way to avoid the indignity and pain of regular terrorist outrages.

Prior to 11 September, US engagement had become increasingly conditional, leading to criticisms of American unilateralism, or at least a readiness to act multilaterally only on America's own terms. The Bush administration was even more of the view than its predecessor that involvement in distant Third-World civil wars, requiring external help with constabulary duties and nation building, was a luxury it could not afford. The broad thrust of its military preparations was focused on decisive battles against regular armed forces. If the shock of 11 September leads to a reversal of course, then this would truly be an important moment in international history.

On this basis, instead of gearing up its security policy to deal with strong, but for the moment, hypothetical 'peer competitors', the US must take more seriously the problems of weak states and the conflicts they engender. The

dangers of allowing deep grievances to fester while insidious ideologies are being promoted have been highlighted.

That this should be the case has been argued, especially by Tony Blair, who has claimed that the shock provides a real opportunity as it has 'opened the world up':

> Countries are revising their relations with others, pondering the opportunities for re-alignment. New alliances are being fashioned. New world views formed. And it is all happening fast. There is a shortcut through normal diplomacy. So we should grasp the moment and move, not let our world slip back into rigidity.[60]

Blair had held this activist and interventionist view from the start of his premiership, but there is no evidence as yet that this is now shared by the Bush administration.[61] Despite the assumption that it must become more engaged, in order to deny terrorists favourable political conditions and prevent the destabilisation of vulnerable regimes, a successful and not too difficult campaign against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan could just as easily lead to the opinion that American foreign and defence policy is about right.

There is now a more multilateral tone to foreign policy, but this has yet to manifest itself in a greater appreciation of binding treaties, peacekeeping and nation-building. The stress on the lack of middle ground in the war against terrorism as fought by the United States suggests that instead of a 'large discontinuity in Washington's external behaviour', unilateralist tendencies might be reinforced. [62] One report has referred to the doctrine for the use of force emerging out of Afghanistan as one 'unrestrained by borders or allies'.[63] Clear signals have been sent out to other, more established opponents, and in particular, Iraq, that they have now good reason to be uncomfortable about their future prospects. [64] The US war on terrorism has yet to run its course and there is no reason to suppose that future stages will be easier than the first. A drive of this sort cannot but shake up local and global political structures, often in quite surprising and unintended ways. Whether or not international politics will be so transformed at the end of this process that it can be described as the third world war remains to be seen. A key test will be exactly how the United States emerges from this as an international actor.

Notes

1   Lawrence Freedman, *The Revolution in Strategic Affairs*, Adelphi Paper 318, (London: OUP for IISS, 1998).

2   On 12 November, an American Airlines aircraft crashed into a New York suburb just after take-off. The US government suggested that the cause was most likely mechanical, thereby discounting the coincidence of another tragedy exactly two months after those on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

3   President George W. Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*, 20 September 2001, United States Capitol, Washington DC. The United States defines 'international terrorism' as terrorism involving the citizens or property of more than one country. Terrorism is broadly defined as politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by substantial groups or clandestine agents.

4   Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

5   In an interview with CNN's Peter Arnett on 11 May 1997, bin Laden stated his demands: 'the driving away jihad against the US does not stop with its withdrawal from the Arabian peninsula, but rather it must desist from aggressive intervention against Muslims in the whole world.' http://CNN.com/CNN/Programs/impact/9705/09/feature/transcript.ladin.html. He issued a declaration of war after his move from Sudan to Afghanistan in 1996, just after the June bombing of the US Air Force barracks in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. The fatwa was published through a London-based Arabic newspaper in 1998. In it he stated that: 'The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies – civilians and military

– is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do so, in order to liberate the Al-Aqsa mosque [in Jerusalem] and the Holy Mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order to for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim'. See Magnus Ranstorp, 'Interpreting the Broader Context and Meaning of Bin-Laden's *Fatwa*', *Studies In Conflict and Terrorism* 21 (1998).

6   Hamid Mir, interview with Osama bin Laden, *Sunday Times*, 11 November 2001.

7   Speech by the President to the Warsaw Conference on Combating Terrorism, 6 November 2001, http://www.usembassy.org.uk/bush110.html

8   In 2000, intelligence agencies picked up a message from a group in al-Qaeda who boasted that bin Laden was going to carry out a 'Hiroshima' against the US. James Risen with Stephen Engelberg, 'Failure to Heed Signs of Change in Terror Goals', *New York Times*, 14 October 2001.

9   For example, Bush Warsaw Speech (see note 7): 'We will not wait for the authors of mass murder to gain the weapons of mass destruction'.

10 See the reports by Anthony Loyd in *The Times* on 15 and 16 November 2001 on documents found in abandoned al-Qaeda safe houses in Kabul with detailed designs for missiles, bombs and nuclear weapons. A formula was found for making the poison ricin.

11 In his interview with Mir (note 6) he declared 'that if America used chemical or nuclear weapons against us, then we may retort with chemical and nuclear weapons. We have the weapons as deterrent.' Even as he fled Kabul, the Taliban leader, Mullah Muhammed Omar, told the BBC World Service that 'the real matter is

the extinction of America' and that this would happen 'within a short period of time'. *The Times*, 16 November 2001.

12 As set out by Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and anti-War: Survival at the Dawn of the 21st Century* (Boston, MA: Little Brown & Co. 1993). Two important articles in establishing the intellectual credentials of the RMA were Andrew Krepinevich, 'Cavalry to Computer: The Pattern of Military Revolutions', *The National Interest* 37 (Fall 1994) and Admiral William Owens, 'The Emerging System of Systems', *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, May 1995.

13 Maureen Dowd, 'That Yankee Music', *The New York Times,* 4 November 2001.

14 Nik Gowing, 'Outfoxed in the Information War', *Time,* 12 November 2001.

15 Comments by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, 29 September 2001, www.usembassy.org.uk/terror172.html

16 The features of strategies of the weak are: 'concentrating on imposing pain rather than winning battles; gaining time rather than moving to closure; targeting the enemy's domestic political base as much as his forward military capabilities; relying on his intolerance of casualties and his weaker stake in the resolution of the conflict, and playing on a reluctance to cause civilian suffering'. Freedman (note 1), p. 41.

17 On the history of terrorist methods see Walter Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1987).

18 Lawrence Freedman, 'The Gulf war and the new world order,' *Survival*, vol. 33, no. 3 (May/June 1991).

19 Robert Caplan, 'The Coming Anarchy', *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1992, p. 48.

20 Kenneth Campbell, 'Once Burned, Twice Cautious: Explaining the Weinberger–Powell Doctrine', *Armed Forces and Society*, Spring 1998. See Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1990).

21 Colin Powell with Joseph Perisco, *My American Journey: An Autobiography*, (New York: Random House, 1995). See also Charles Stevenson, 'The Evolving Clinton Doctrine on the Use of Force', *Armed Forces and Society,* vol. 22, no. 4 (Summer 1996). It has been noted that application of the Weinberger tests in 1965 would probably have permitted entry into the Vietnam War.

22 The distinction was developed under Powell's guidance in US Department of Defense, *Joint Pub 3-0, Doctrine for Joint Operations*, (Washington DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1993). See Stevenson, Ibid., p. 517

23 Michael O'Hanlon, 'Prudent or Paranoid? The Pentagon's Two-War Plans', *Survival*, vol. 43, no. 1 (Spring 2000).

24 Department of Defense, *Field Manual 100-5, Operations*, Washington DC, Department of the Army, 1982, Section 2–1.

25 Colonel Harry Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, (Novato, CA**:** Presidio Press, 1982).

26 Cited in Larry Cable, 'Reinventing the Round Wheel: Insurgency, Counter-Insurgency, and Peacekeeping Post Cold War', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 4 (Autumn 1993).

27 Remarks by President George W. Bush at the US Naval Academy Commencement, 25 May 2001, http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/05/20010525-1.html

28 Andrew Mack, 'Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict', *World Politics* 27.2 (January 1975).

29 Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, May 1997), Section II.

30 Department of Defense, *Joint Vision 2020* (Washington DC: The Joint Staff, 2000), p.5. This paragraph draws heavily on Steven Metz and Douglas V. Johnson. *Asymmetry and U.S. Military Strategy: Definition, Background, and Strategic Concepts,* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2001). They are also inclined to generic definitions: 'acting, organising, and thinking differently than opponents in order to maximise one's own advantages, exploit an opponent's weaknesses, attain the initiative, or gain greater freedom of action'. They wish to encourage thinking on how the US military might use asymmetry against its opponents. It is hard to see how asymmetric warfare so broadly defined is that different from all types of strategic thought.

31 J. Arquilla and D. Ronfeldt, 'The Advent of Netwar: Analytical Background', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 22.3 (July–Sept 1999).

32 Jerrold M. Post, Keven G. Ruby, and Eric D. Shaw', 'From Car Bombs to Logic Bombs: The Growing Threat from Information Terrorism', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, (Summer 2000), pp. 102–3.

33 Edward Luttwak, 'Towards Post-Heroic Warfare', *Foreign Affairs* 74.3 (May–June 1995).

34 Cited in Andrew Erdmann, 'The U.S. Presumption of Quick, Costless Wars', *Orbis* (Summer 1999).

35 Jeffrey Record, 'Force-Protection Fetishism: Sources, Consequences, and (?) Solutions', *Aerospace Power Journal*, Summer 2000, p. 5.

36 Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U.S. Military Operations* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1996); Steven Kull and Clay Ramsay, 'The Myth of the Reactive Public: American Public Attitudes on Military Fatalities in the Post-Cold War Period', in Philip Everts and Pierangelo Isernia (eds), *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force*, (London: Routledge, 2001).

37 In other contingencies involving Taiwan and Iraq, the acceptable levels were much higher but the ordering of tolerance, with the public most relaxed, remained the same. The results were reported in Peter D. Feaver and Christopher Gelpi. 'A Look at Casualty Aversion: How Many Deaths Are Acceptable? A Surprising Answer', *Washington Post,* 7 November 1999. For a discussion of all relevant findings see Charles Hyde, 'Casualty Aversion: Implications for Policy Makers and Senior Military Officers', *Aerospace Power Journal*, Summer 2000.

38 *Positive Match*, a war game to test the proposed QDR posture, the results of which were reported a couple of days before the WTC attacks, relaxed the two countries standard by asking whether the US could defeat one potential adversary, North Korea, while also repelling an attack from Iraq, rather than also defeating it decisively. The planners also looked at how military operations would be affected if another event, such as terrorists attacking New York City with chemical weapons took place at the same time. Thom Shanker, 'War Game Reassures Pentagon on Readiness', *International Herald Tribune,* 8–9 September 2001.

39 For recent literature on terrorism and weapons of mass destruction see Gavin Cameron, *Nuclear Terrorism: A Threat Assessment for the 21st Century*, (London: Macmillan, 1999); Richard A. Falkenrath, Robert D. Newman, and Bradley Thayer, *America's Achilles' Heel: Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Terrorism and Covert Attack*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998); Peter R. Lavoy, Scott D. Sagan, and

James J Wirtz (eds), *Planning the Unthinkable: How New Powers Will Use Nuclear, Chemical and Biological Weapons* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Jan Lodal, *The Price of Dominance: The New Weapons of Mass Destruction and Their Challenge to American Leadership* (New York: Council on Foreign Relation, 2001); Brad Roberts (ed.), *Terrorism with Chemical and Biological Weapons: Calibrating the Risks and Responses*, (Alexandria, VA: The Chemical and Biological Arms Control Institute, 1997). James M. Smith (ed.), *Searching for National Security in an NBC World* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: USAF Institute for National Security Studies, 2000); Jessica Stern, *The Ultimate Terrorists,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) .

[40] Brian M. Jenkins, *Will Terrorists Go Nuclear?* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1975); see also Ehud Sprinzak, 'Rational Fanatics,' *Foreign Policy*, September/October 2000.

[41] Bruce Hoffman, 'American and the New Terrorism: An Exchange', *Survival*, vol. 42, no. 2, (Summer 2000), pp. 163–4. Hoffman had done much to encourage the view of a new era. Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). His sceptical view in 2000 was expressed in response to Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin, 'America and the New Terrorism', *Survival,* vol. 42, no. 1 (Spring 2000), which had offered a much gloomier prospect, with a particular focus on the serious intent and capacity of al-Qaeda.

[42] A nation-wide survey in the mid-1990s found that 72% of Americans believed that there was a chance that terrorists could use a weapon of mass destruction to attack a US city but only 13% worried about this. Two out of three declared themselves not much or not at all worried about terrorism in public places, and most saw the risks more likely to emerge from inside the US than outside (49% as against 39%) The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, Washington DC, 28–30 March 1996, www.people-press.org**.**

[43] US Commission on National Security/21st Century, *New World Coming: American Security in the 21st Century*, Washington DC, 1999, p. 48. For a sharp but unfortunately timed critique of the commission's work, see Ian Roxborough, *The Hart-Rudman Commission and the Homeland Defense*, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, September 2001). For a similar emphasis, see also National Commission on Terrorism, *Countering the Changing Threat of International Terrorism* (Washington DC: US Congress, 2000). Pursuant to Public Law 277, 105th Congress. This also focused on a state-sponsored, mass casualty, catastrophic attack and implied that US policy might be too heavily focused on Osama bin Laden. Similarly, a major study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) with many thoughtful recommendations to improve homeland defence, made national missile defence the priority issue, and focused on chemical, biological, nuclear and radiological weapons, and cyber-terrorism. Frank Cilluffo *et al.*, *Defending America in the 21st Century: New Challenges, New Organizations, and New Policies: Executive Summary of Four CSIS Working Group Reports on Homeland Defense* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2000).

[44] The 1993 attack on the World Trade Center left six killed and 1,000 wounded. The intent was to topple one tower on to the other, which would have caused mass casualties. Other failed attempts included the plan in 1995 to destroy eleven US

civilian aircraft over the Pacific, while in December 1999 attacks on millennium celebrations in Israel and the United States were thwarted. On 7 August 1998 the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were bombed, killing 300 people, including 12 Americans, and injuring 5,000 more. In February 2001, CIA Director George J. Tenet reported that the threat from terrorism was his priority, noting that terrorists were becoming 'more operationally adept and more technically sophisticated', looking at softer civilian targets as military targets came to be better protected. 'Usama bin Laden and his global network of lieutenants and associates remain the most immediate and serious threat … capable of planning multiple attacks with little or no warning'. Remarks by Director of Central Intelligence, George J. Tenet on the 'World-wide Threat 2001: National Security in a Changing World', 7 February 2001, www.usembassy.org.uk/terror128.html

[45] The suicide bomber attacks on the US Embassy in Beirut in April 1983 and then the marine barracks six months, which left 231 dead, accelerated the US withdrawal from the Lebanon. Harvey W. Kushner, 'Suicide Bombers: Business as Usual', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 19, (October–December 1996). Less successful were the original suicide bombers – the Japanese Kamikaze pilots who flew their aircraft into American warships. With some 1,900 sorties they inflicted 3,389 fatalities.

[46] Richard K. Betts, 'The New Threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction', *Foreign Affairs* 77.1 (January/February 1998), p. 41. The al-Qaeda cell that organised the 11 September attacks appear to have explored the possibility of using crop-spraying aircraft to release biological weapons and decided that the outcome was too uncertain.

[47] General Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo and the Future of Conflict*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2001).

[48] Condoleezza Rice, 'Promoting the National Interest', *Foreign Affairs* 79.1 (January–February 2000), p. 53.

[49] Quadrennial Defense Review Report, 30 September 2001, p. 21. www.defenselink.mil/pubs/ qdr2001.pdf. A former Secretary of Defense, William Perry, also gave the impression that the most important policy response to the terrorist attacks would be in the area of missile defence. 'The Next Attack', *Foreign Affairs*, 80:6 (November–December 2001).

[50] Ralph Peters, 'The New Warrior Class', *Parameters*, vol. XXIV, no. 2 (Summer 1994), p. 20

[51] Edward Cody, 'Taliban's Hide-and-Wait Tactics Tied to US Aversion to Casualties', *International Herald Tribune*, 22 October 2001.

[52] For a full assessment of how the war looked after a month, noting the adjustments that had been made in US strategy, see Michael R. Gordon, 'A Month in a Difficult Battlefield: Assessing US War Strategy', *New York Times*, 8 November 2001.

[53] See news briefing by Secretary Rumsfeld, 15 November 2001.

[54] This is discussed in the British Government's paper, *Responsibility for the Terrorist Atrocities in the United States, 11 September 2001: An Updated Account*, 14 November 2001

[55] Theo Farrell, 'Sliding into War: The Somalia Imbroglio and US Army Peace Operations Doctrine', *International Peacekeeping* 2.2 (1995).

[56] 1997 interview with Peter Arnett, note 5.

[57] As did the senior commander of UN forces in Bosnia, General Sir Michael Rose, who explained his own caution with regular references to the 'Mogadishu line'. General Sir Michael

Rose, *Fighting for Peace: Bosnia 1994*, (London: The Harvill Press, 1998).

[58] Kenneth F. McKenzie, *The Revenge of the Melians: Asymmetric Threats and the Next QDR*. Mcnair Papers 62 (Washington DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, 2000). McKenzie also warned against reducing the asymmetric argument to a discussion of the strategic WMD threat to the United States homeland. This he argued, was 'a dangerous oversimplification because, while it captures the most destructive and frightening end of the asymmetric spectrum, it also ignores a number of far more likely applications of asymmetry.' p. 54. His list of applications did not, however, catch the sort of superterrorist act that was inflicted upon the US.

[59] Not only was the response robust but a majority view appears to have been that military action abroad would be more effective than building up defences at home. See Survey conducted by Pew Research Center, 21–25 September 2001, www.people-press.org/Sept01rpt2.htm. For a full analysis of the public response, see Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland, *Americans on the War on Terrorism*, 6 November 2001,

www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/ Terrorism/WaronTerr.html. Attitudes were formed when the death toll was extremely uncertain. Some initial speculation put it in five figures. Soon the number of 5–6,000 killed was being made. By mid-November, the actual number appeared to be closer to 3–4,000. Eric Lipton, 'Toll from Attack at World Trade Center is Down Sharply', *New York Times*, 21 November 2001. In absolute terms, this was still high, exceeding, for example, the 2,500 killed at Pearl Harbor.

[60] Speech by the Prime Minister, The Right Honourable Tony Blair MP, Lord Mayor's Banquet, Guildhall, 12 November 2001.

[61] See, for example his speech in Chicago on *The Doctrine of International Community*, 22 April 1999, www.number-10/public/info index.html

[62] For a sceptical view, see Steven E. Miller, 'The End of Unilateralism, or Unilateralism Redux', *Washington Quarterly*, 25:1 (Winter 2001).

[63] Patrick Tyler, 'Directions of Global War on Terror Raises Unsettling Questions', *New York Times*, 21 November 2001.

[64] Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, interview with CBS *Face the Nation*, 18 November 2001.