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summary

Like the Cold War, the war against terrorism will be a very long struggle in which ideological, political, and socioeconomic campaigns will be as important as military campaigns. To achieve any kind of long-term success, the United States must combat not only the terrorist groups themselves, but the wider movements that give them support and shelter.

It is therefore extremely important that U.S. policy makers learn the lessons of the Cold War. Above all, this means recognition of the ways in which various radical Islamist movements, like the communist movements of the past, are fueled by nationalism. Understanding this will help the United States to seek allies in the Muslim world and should also lead to new U.S. approaches to the Arab-Israeli peace process. ■

Fighting Terrorism: Lessons from the Cold War

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The war on terrorism, which the United States has now been compelled to undertake, will not greatly resemble traditional war. It will, however, have certain important similarities to the Cold War, or at least to those parts of that struggle which took place in what used to be called the third world. Like the struggle against communism, this will be a long, multifaceted struggle in which the terrorist groups must be combated, but so too must be the factors that impel much larger populations to give those groups support and shelter. As in the Cold War, U.S. military action will be only one element of U.S. strategy, and usually not the most important. As then, a central danger is that anti-Western forces will succeed in carrying out revolutions in important states, seizing control and turning them into more bases for anti-Western actions. It is therefore important that the United States plot its strategy with the Cold War's successes and failures clearly in mind.

For while the ideology of radical Islamism is, of course, fundamentally religious, it also profits critically from socioeconomic discontent and the failure of existing Muslim states to achieve progress toward a prosperous democracy. Radical groups promise a revolution in this world based on the principles of justice embodied in the Koran and the Shariah. Radical groups also gain support and prestige through aid to the poor and dispossessed. As in the Cold War, therefore, one key element of U.S. strategy must be help in the social, economic, and political development, not just of allied states, but also of "nonaligned" states that are at risk of falling to the enemy.

The Importance of Knowledge

The challenge of dealing with the opaque world of radical Islam emphasizes the need for something that was often lacking in the Cold War, with tragic consequences: an adequate supply of genuine area specialists. In Vietnam, if U.S. leaders had listened to real



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Carnegie's Russian and Eurasian Program is a premier policy research center on the former Soviet Union. The program operates the Carnegie Moscow Center, the first research center of its size and kind in the former Soviet Union.

experts on that country, both the strength of the communists and the complexities of the Vietnamese situation would have been better appreciated and a U.S. intervention leading to the deaths of 59,000 U.S. soldiers and millions of Vietnamese might have been avoided. More recently, if the CIA and State Department had possessed more real experts on the Arab and Muslim worlds, they would have stood a much better chance of preventing the catastrophe of September 11. Since it has been admitted that there is an insufficient number of such experts within the U.S. government, they must be urgently recruited from outside.

In recent years, the status of area studies in both government and academia has declined in the face of competition from approaches based on such universal theoretical models as rational choice theory. Such approaches tend to suit both military and security bureaucracies and individual officials because they allow public servants to work in many different areas in preparation for a climb to the top of their respective institutions, rather than restricting them for many years to only one part of the world. As in the Cold War, so it is in the war on terrorism that the dangers stemming from this tendency are made worse by a mixture of ignorance, ingrained prejudice, and an ideologically rigid categorization of "the enemy." This has got to stop. A U.S. planner who cannot tell the difference between a Shia and a Sunni or a Sufi and a Wahabi should be encouraged to exercise his or her planning skills in a different field.

Islamism and Nationalism

The second area where regional studies can play an important role is in understanding the contribution of nationalism to various radical Islamisms. Here, the parallels to the Cold War are close. Although in theory nationalism is as alien to the idea of the universal Muslim world community (or *Umma*) as it was to the Marxist idea of the unity of the world prole-

tariat, in practice radical Islamism, like communism, is permeated by nationalism. Arab nationalism helps fuel Al-Qaida, just as Pashtun nationalism provides a good deal of the support for Taliban. However, just as in the communist world, nationalism can also create deep divisions in the "enemy" camp.

Thus the Iranian nationalism that underlies much of the official Shia ideology of Iran helps to set Iran against both Arab Sunni psalmists and the Taliban, who are based in the Pashtun ethnic group. Iran had to fight a long and horribly costly war as a result of Iraq's invasion of Iran in 1979, an invasion explicitly justified by Saddam Hussein in terms of anti-Iranian Arab nationalism. The Taliban's radical Sunni ideology is as alien to Iran's radical Shiism as radical Protestantism was to Catholicism in the Europe of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This, and the element of Pashtun chauvinism in the Taliban, led them in 1998 to massacre thousands of members of the Shia Hazara minority in Afghanistan, together with several Iranian diplomats and journalists, bringing Iran and the Taliban to the brink of war. In Pakistan, Taliban-backed Sunni extremist groups have conducted a long terror campaign against the Shia minority.

If the war against terrorism is to be waged successfully, it is essential that the role of nationalism be fully recognized by U.S. planners, as it was not in the first decades of the Cold War. On the one hand, the failure of U.S. planners in the early 1960s to understand the role of Vietnamese nationalism in fueling the North Vietnamese and Vietcong struggle led them to misunderstand the entire nature of that conflict and grossly to underestimate the resilience and mass support for the communists. On the other hand, the failure to recognize the growing split between the Chinese and Soviet/Russian communist states—fueled by rival nationalisms already apparent in the early 1960s—led to a strategy based on the perception of a united world communist threat that in fact no longer existed.

The nexus between nationalism and radical Islamism is even more dangerous to the United States than was that between nationalism and communism. With the exception of Central America and perhaps Iran, although the communists were, of course, hostile to the United States, they did not necessarily feel a strong ethnic nationalist hatred for Americans of the kind that Croats feel for Serbs or Chechens for Russians. America was simply too distant. In this war, the situation is different as far as many Arabs are concerned because the presence of Israel in the heart of the Arab world—widely viewed in the region as an extension of the United States—generates precisely this element of virulent ethnic nationalism.

none of the Arab states has been able to achieve lasting social, economic, or political progress that would enable them to close the economic gap with the West or Israel. Internationally, Arab nationalists failed hopelessly in their initial goal of uniting all Arabs in one state and were defeated again and again when they fought with Israel and its Western allies, a pattern continued by Iraq's defeat in the Gulf War of 1991.

Since the 1970s this failure has led Egypt and other states to seek an alliance with the United States and détente with Israel. As far as the Arab masses are concerned, however, this strategy also seems largely to have failed. Just as the socialist methods of previous decades failed to bring about rapid domestic

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Of course, over the decades Arab nationalism has taken many different forms and has underpinned a variety of different states. For several decades, beginning in the 1950s, its dominant form was radical secular nationalism with a strongly socialist cast, as expressed by Nasser in Egypt and by the Ba'ath movements in Syria and Iraq. In those countries, Ba'athism remains the state ideology. In Egypt too, although the radical tone of state rhetoric diminished greatly after Nasser's death and Anwar Sadat's swing toward the United States, nationalism remains at the core of the state's projected self-image.

The problem is that all the secular or moderately religious variants of Arab nationalism, whether the states concerned have been anti- or pro-American, have failed in the achievement of their chief aims. At home,

progress, so too have the more free-market policies of the 1990s. Alignment with the United States has not led to American support of the kind of Israeli-Palestinian settlement that would even minimally satisfy Arab desires. These multiple failures and humiliations have bred a mood of Arab bitterness from which the extremist groups draw much of their strength; they have also strengthened the role of supposedly Koran-based radical political, social, and economic solutions as a kind of default mode when all other paths have apparently been tried and failed.

Ideally, the link between Arab nationalism and radical Islamist terrorism should be weakened by a major change in U.S. policy toward Israel, leading to a complete Israeli withdrawal from the territory occupied beyond the frontiers of 1967 (in return, of

course, for guarantees of Israeli sovereignty and security within those borders). An Israeli withdrawal would certainly not end support for radical Islamism, which, as noted, also has wider roots. It would, however, cut into that support and make it much easier for Arab regimes to help the fight against it. Should such a change in U.S. and Israeli policies not happen, then a strong measure of Arab nationalist hostility to the United States and sympathy for anti-American terrorism will be inevitable for the foreseeable future.

Iran as China

Increased Arab hostility and sympathy for anti-American terrorism make it even more

South Vietnam fell, it proved entirely possible to contain any resulting Vietnamese regional threat by relying on the anti-Vietnamese sentiments of China, Cambodia, and other Southeast Asian states.

Just as with Nixon and Kissinger's opening to China in the early 1970s, for an "opening to Iran," no greatly increased affection or respect between the U.S. and Iranian systems is necessary. Nor is a rapid and complete victory of more liberal forces in Iran and the abandonment of links to Palestinian radicals necessary. Instead of making those changes a precondition for the relaxation of U.S. sanctions, such a shift in U.S. policy should be seen as beginning a dynamic and

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important that the United States be in a position to exploit the deep differences between Iranians and Arabs and, more widely, between Shias and Sunnis. What must at all costs be avoided is the absolutely grotesque situation in which the United States found itself in 1969–1970. The U.S. intervention in Vietnam was to a great extent premised on the assumption of a united communist bloc as existed to a considerable extent during the Korean War.

Instead, by the end of the 1960s, hundreds of Chinese and Soviet soldiers were dying in clashes on their common frontier, and the two communist giants at one point appeared to be approaching nuclear war. Yet at the same time, U.S. soldiers were dying by the thousands in Vietnam in a struggle that had come to lack real geopolitical significance. After the United States withdrew and

continuing process, contributing to a "virtuous circle" of development in Iran's external and internal politics. The existence of a partially theocratic state in Iran can hardly in itself be an argument against U.S. moves for cooperation, since the United States is closely allied to the Saudi state, which imposes a considerably harsher and more totalitarian set of rules on its population in the name of the state religion. The Saudi example also shows the folly of portraying all "Muslim fundamentalists" as automatic enemies of the United States.

After all, the overwhelming vote for reformist candidates in recent Iranian elections would seem to give a much better basis for reconciliation with the United States than anything to be seen in communist China in the early 1970s when that state was still ruled by Mao Tse-tung and engaging in extremely

savage anti-Western rhetoric. The period of the Vietnam War covered the time of the worst Maoist crimes, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution. That did not prevent recognition, though tragically belated, by realist American conservative statesmen that China and the Soviet Union had become enemies and therefore that there were tremendous advantages to be gained by a strategic reconciliation with China.

Today, the United States needs to understand and profit from the deep hatred felt by Iranians (conservatives as much as liberals) for the Taliban and for Iraq. An opening to Iran is also desirable because Western European countries—and to a much greater

conflict using its own forces; Korea is also an example of the need even in war to respect the interests of neighboring states. If in 1950 the U.S. forces on the Korean peninsula had restricted themselves to driving the communist invaders from South Korea, it would have gone down as an important U.S. victory. By counterinvading North Korea and drawing in the forces of communist China, the U.S. army suffered severe losses.

The direct employment of U.S. forces is liable to strengthen the nationalist credentials of the enemy; equally important, the enormous amounts of money spent by and for U.S. forces and the extravagant and alien lifestyles of U.S. troops can have a radically

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extent Russia—have already achieved new relationships with Iran. It would therefore be difficult for the United States to achieve an effective common international strategy toward threats from the Middle East while maintaining a stance of unrelenting hostility toward Iran.

Limited Force

A key lesson of the Cold War is that neither the use nor even the deployment of U.S. forces necessarily needs to be extensive. Of course, on occasion military operations by U.S. forces have been and will be unavoidable. That was true in Korea in 1950, and it is true today of U.S. military retaliation against Al-Qaida. Still, the Korean War may well have been the *only* occasion during all the four decades of the Cold War when the United States really had to fight a large-scale

transforming effect on the societies in which they find themselves. In the case of fragile traditional societies, this is by no means always for the good. Local economies may be disrupted; local elites encouraged to indulge in orgies of kleptocracy; and traditional values may be outraged by the behavior of U.S. soldiers and their local camp followers.

The other factor to be considered is the likely results should the traditional U.S. way of waging ground warfare be repeated. For this has been to reduce casualties among U.S. troops by employing overwhelming firepower, with frequently devastating results for the local civilian population. This will not matter if U.S. actions are restricted to raids to capture Osama bin Laden and other key lieutenants in rural hideouts; but it would matter very much indeed if U.S. troops became involved in major combat in cities like Kabul,

Kandahar, or indeed Baghdad. There, U.S. troops could find themselves repeating the experience of Hue and Grozny.

In this struggle, massive casualties among Afghan and other civilians should be avoided whenever possible. Apart from the moral issue, avoiding extensive casualties is important above all, of course, because of the impact in the Muslim world. The full support of the authorities and ordinary people in Muslim states for the struggle against terrorism is absolutely essential, most of all in the fields of intelligence and policing, as it was in many countries in the struggle against communist subversion during the Cold War.

The United States also needs to avoid simply giving a blank check to local client states and groups both to carry out domestic repression and to conduct proxy wars on its behalf. These have often led to appalling humanitarian consequences in the past. Moreover, local ambitions and rivalries mean that unrestrained actions by local clients can turn out to be contrary to America's own long-term interests.

The Cold War and post-Cold War periods are full of such examples. In Iran, brutal repression by the Shah's regime, far from strengthening the Shah's rule, undermined it and helped bring about a major long-term setback for the United States. In Angola, the United States is now aligned with the former communists against its own former UNITA allies. Above all, however, there is the case of Afghanistan, where indiscriminate U.S. support for the anti-communist side contributed in no small degree to the present murderous threat from Al-Qaida and the Taliban to U.S. lives and U.S. interests.

The U.S. and Europe

The United States also needs to exercise restraint because the way in which it conducts this struggle could have extremely important results for its alliance with Europe. If the struggle is badly mishandled over a long period, it will risk reviving the mass anti-American Euro-

pean protest movements of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s in circumstances where the imminent Soviet threat is no longer there to hold European governments in the U.S. camp.

The European protest movements of the Cold War stemmed from four main roots: left-wing sympathy for the Soviet Union and hostility to the United States as the core of the capitalist world; nationalism, manifested in a dislike of American hegemony; outrage at atrocities by the United States and by its client states, especially in Vietnam and Latin America; and the fear of a nuclear attack.

All these elements are still present in one form or another—or could return. The threat of mass protest and anti-American subversion and terrorism is, of course, increased by the presence of large, growing, vocal, and often embittered Muslim immigrant minorities in key European states. Although old-style socialism has virtually disappeared, as sympathy for the Soviet Union obviously has, the growing Green movements in Europe often have marked anti-American attitudes. Hostility to U.S. hegemony and unilateralism is growing even among the European elites, encouraged by different attitudes to key areas of policy like climate change.

In the context of U.S.–European cooperation in the war against terrorism, however, of greatest importance is Israeli policy and U.S.–Israeli relations, and to a lesser extent, U.S. strategy vis-à-vis various states in the Middle East. Concerning the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and especially the Jewish settlements there, the views of European governments and public opinion are very far indeed from those of their American equivalents. This is even true to a considerable extent of Britain, America's closest ally in Europe. Several key European governments are also very skeptical about increased military pressure on Iraq.

None of this would matter much if European support for the United States were to continue to be seen as largely risk-free. However, if Europeans think that their cities

are in danger of a massive terrorist attack (especially by weapons of mass destruction) as the result of Israeli and U.S. or U.S.-backed policies of which they strongly disapprove, then a revival of the anti-American mass movements of the Cold War is entirely possible. Given that risk and the importance of the Euro-Atlantic partnership generally, not only in combating terrorism, the United States should be cautious about engaging in actions likely to increase its differences with Europe still further.

The Lessons

To recapitulate: The first lesson of the Cold War is *know thine enemy*. Instead of positing

The third lesson is the need for an ideological struggle against the mixture of radical Islamist ideologies and groups within which the terrorist groups operate and from which they draw their strength. Radical Islamism operates within the Arab and Muslim worlds and can only be defeated by Arabs and Muslims themselves using as their argument the success of models that can be presented as legitimately Arab and Muslim. This will require real social, economic, and democratic progress in leading Muslim states. It also requires Israel's surrender of the territorial gains it has made at the expense of Arabs since 1967. In return, a Palestinian state would be required to recognize the borders of

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some undifferentiated general threat, learn to distinguish between different strands in Islamic radicalism, whether religious, national, or political. Listen to those area specialists who understand those differences, and exploit the splits wherever possible. The most important aspect of this lesson is to understand how nationalism contributes to different radical Islamisms, just as it did to different communisms.

The second lesson is the need for strong allies—not just allied states, but, equally important, forces within states. Strengthening those forces with U.S. aid and encouragement for socioeconomic reforms is usually more important than military action. Indeed, while the deployment and use of U.S. forces may sometimes be unavoidable, both are best kept to a minimum. When military action is unavoidable, care should be taken to lessen civilian casualties when military realities permit.

1967 and Israel's existence within them, and fully to assume a state's normal duties in not allowing attacks on its neighbors from its own territory. The United States and the international community should guarantee this settlement.

Such a negotiated retreat by Israel would be acutely difficult and painful, both for Israel and for any U.S. administration and Congress steeled to put pressure on Israel to carry out such a retreat. Yet, without such a change of policy, it will never be possible to rally most of the Arab world for a sincere and full-blooded struggle against terrorism and the states that support it. Without their help, not only will the war against terrorism never be won, but given the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the war could even be lost—with disastrous consequences for the United States, the West, and the world.

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