

The Political Forum

*A review of social and political trends and events
impacting the world's financial markets*

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SOME THOUGHTS ON TERRORISM

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As I have indicated numerous times in various articles over the past several years, one of the biggest threats to American society in the next century, and thus to American business interests worldwide, I believe, will be a rapid rise in international terrorism. So this week, in light of the recent bombings at U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, I thought I'd offer a few thoughts on the subject.

I will begin by recommending a superb piece written by Robin Wright in the August 9, *Los Angeles Times*, entitled "Prophetic 'Terror 2000' Mapped Evolving Threat." It can be found on the *Times's* website, www.latimes.com. This article provides a comprehensive look at the nature of modern day terrorism and discusses America's vulnerability to it. It is based on the findings of a Pentagon report entitled "Terror 2000: The Future Face of Terrorism," which was co-authored by my good friend Peter Probst in the early 1990s.

Regular readers will recall that I have quoted Peter in numerous articles, beginning with one in January, 1996 entitled "Apocalypse Soon?" Besides some sobering thoughts on the growing threat of the use of biological, chemical and nuclear agents, that piece offered the following observation from Peter, which is, I think, worth considering today, as the world prepares to grapple with the enormity of the upcoming Y2K problem. While reading this, consider how much worse things might be should international terrorists decide to do a little destructive hacking on January 1, 2000.

The international banking and monetary systems are particularly vulnerable. Computer driven attacks could cause major disruptions of electronic fund transfers and the alternation or destruction of vital financial account information. Stock quotes could be altered. Buy and sell orders manipulated. Monies could be deposited to the wrong accounts, or in the wrong amounts, or simply disappear.

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Peter is a former CIA employee who now works in the nerve center of the Secretary of Defense's anti-terrorism operation. He also is, as I mentioned in a recent piece on terrorism entitled "Homo Homini Lupus," a senior official at the "The Institute for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence." ISTEPV's president is another friend, former Associate Deputy Director of the FBI Buck Revell.

ISTPV is, by the way, a non-profit group, which as I also said in that piece, could use some corporate sponsorship. If anyone is interested, and would like information, please call me. In the interest of full disclosure, I should say that I am honored to serve on an ISTEPV advisory panel.

Peter's "Terror 2000" report was never formally released to the public. As Wright explains, "even a sanitized version designed to promote public preparedness was axed" because it was deemed "too alarmist and far-fetched." Today, five short years later, it is doubtful that anyone who knows anything about terrorism would regard virtually any prediction concerning the nature or number of possible terrorist attacks against U.S. targets as overly alarmist or outside the realm of possibility.

In fact, many of the most frightening and seemingly alarmist forecasts in the report have either occurred somewhere in the world since it was written, or been thwarted by effective intelligence gathering and subsequent action. Furthermore, the possibility of the most horrendous types of terrorist actions are today routinely discussed in the popular media.

The November 17, 1997 issue of *U.S. New & World Report*, for example, carried a lengthy article entitled "Terrorism's Next Wave, Nerve gas and germs are the new weapons of choice." The following is a paragraph from that article.

U.S. News has learned that the FBI has 50 current investigations of individuals suspected of using or planning to use radiological, biological, or chemical agents. Bureau officials say a major attack in the United States no longer seems unlikely. "The consensus of people in the law enforcement and intelligence communities is that it is not a matter of if it is going to happen, it's when," warns Robert Blitzer, head of the FBI's terrorism section. "We are very concerned."

Indeed, the belief that terrorist attacks against U.S. targets are likely to increase in number and severity is so widespread today that virtually every major city in the nation is preparing for the worst. A front page article in the *New York Times* on June 19 entitled "New York Girds for Grim Fear: Germ Terrorism," reported that "The Big Apple" is "buying germ detectors, working out deals with regional hospitals for emergency care, striking unusual accords with drug companies to make medicines quickly in an emergency and taking steps to stockpile medications."

The thoughts that I would like to offer on the subject this week have to do with what the U.S. response to this threat is likely to be. When considering this question, it is important, I believe, to understand two things.

The first is that international terrorism is a type of warfare. Indeed, it will undoubtedly be the battlefield of choice for U.S. enemies in the 21st century, given America's clear superiority in all aspects of conventional conflict.

The second is that while the modern day roots of militant Islam's hatred for the United States may be traced to America's support for Israel, this hatred has today expanded well beyond these origins. Any comprehensive look at the speeches and literature of radical Islamists reveals that their implacable hatred for America is firmly established in the inexorable global spread of U.S. cultural influence and business interests, most especially in the Middle East, where they offer a viable and seductive alternative to the ambitious, hegemonic agenda of militant Islam.

Indeed, I think American support for Israel is less a cause of militant Islam's hatred toward the United States than is U.S. friendship with the six small Arab oil producing states, the so-called GCC nations of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

John Duke Anthony, president and CEO of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, reinforced this point this way in a recent op-ed piece in the *Washington Times* entitled "Iran's missile poses test of U.S. resolve."

The resentment [of Iraq and Iran for the GCC states] stems from the fact that these smaller and until recently, poorer Arab countries have passed Iran and Iraq on the inside lane. They have higher per capita OPEC oil production quotas, less unemployment, dynamic economies, well-developed and advanced infrastructure, and far, far more opportunities for their citizens. By almost every standard of developmental achievement, these policies have leapfrogged ahead of Iran and Iraq.

Worse, in the eyes of Baghdad and Tehran, they have done so in the course of close strategic, economic commercial, technological and defense cooperation with the United States.

The roots of revenge date back to the cooperation these six countries provided the United States during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war and the 1990-91 Kuwait crises. Their having helped deliver such a powerful dose of national shame and dishonor to Iran and Iraq has become like a ticking time bomb at the doorstep of every GCC country. For many in the Gulf region, the question is not whether Iran and Iraq will seek retribution, but when.

This is extremely important because it means that the course of militant Islamic terrorism against U.S. targets is not likely to be effected one way or the other by any change in relations between Israel and America. As Peter put it to me recently, the United States is hated today by militant Islamists on its own merits.

In short, this is serious war on a new battlefield, and one that is likely to accelerate as the 20th century ends and the new millennium begins. If I and others who make similar predictions are correct about this, new tactics will have to be developed and refined, and some old ones will have to be taken out of storage.

The first step in this process will be, I believe, to lower the threshold for determining complicity in a terrorist act. In other words, the United States will, in the future, take retribution against nations and individuals who are known to be in league with, or have significant influence over, perpetrators of terrorist violence against U.S. citizens and interests, even if direct involvement cannot be proven.

So what type of retribution will be involved? Well, it is important to distinguish between responses that result from political pressures and those that are part of a long-term, tactical plan for engagement in this type of warfare.

The response to a nuclear, biological or chemical attack in the heart of a large city such as Washington or New York that causes massive numbers of casualties would clearly be influenced by politics, meaning that it would be driven by public demands for immediate revenge. In such a case, a devastating, full blown military attack on a nation that was linked by even a smidgen of evidence to the action would not be out of the question.

In the less emotional environment of day-to-day tactical anti-terrorist warfare, the U.S. response is likely to revolve around highly aggressive covert actions against the military, economic, social and political infrastructures of nations that are known, from intelligence gathering efforts, to be supporting, either directly or indirectly, anti-American terrorism.

These will include such things as crippling attacks of sabotage on critical infrastructures, such as water supply; electrical grids; communication networks, including telephone, radio and television services; all manner and sorts of computer networks; industrial production facilities, particularly oil and gas drilling operations; and critically needed imports, particularly those related to oil and gas operations, and agricultural production. The severity of damage could range from a total breakdown of electrical power to the incapacitation of a nation's commercial airline by a computer "failure" that destroyed all reservations.

Various other types of economic warfare will also be employed, including counterfeiting; constant transactional disruptions, which make routine international trade difficult or impossible; and the spreading of rumors that cause massive swings in the value of a nation's currency.

In addition, actions aimed at discrediting the influence of political leaders will be employed, such as the counterfeiting of "confidential" documents linking them to salacious or illegal acts, and support for insurgency operations both at home and abroad.

Overt military actions, such as the April, 1986 bombing of Libya by President Reagan in response to the bombing a few weeks earlier of a disco in Berlin frequented by U.S. servicemen are unlikely. While that response was politically popular, it was not a particularly successful anti-terrorism action. For one thing, Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi's popular support surged following the attack. More importantly, it prompted him to step up his terrorist activities against U.S. targets. This is not widely known because most of these initiatives were intercepted and blocked before they were carried out. But it is nevertheless true.

A better approach might have been to have weakened his standing at home via a series of economic, political and personal catastrophes. This might have either destroyed him as a leader or kept him so busy that he wouldn't have had the time to plan attacks on American interests in neighboring nations.

Clinton administration policy toward nations that are known to be involved in or supportive of terrorist acts against U.S. interests are diametric to this course. In fact, the administration has let it be known on numerous occasions that it would not take any seriously punitive measures against any nation, or the leadership of any nation, beyond routine and largely toothless "economic sanctions," unless there were ironclad evidence of involvement by that nation in a terrorist incident. Needless to say, such evidence is nearly impossible to obtain.

On the contrary, the hallmark of Clinton administration policy toward such nations has been a series of pleas, both direct and indirect, for "friendship" and "normalized relations."

This policy began early on in the Clinton years with then Secretary of State Warren Christopher's ridiculously numerous, and fruitless, hat-in-hand trips to visit Syria's President Hafaz al-Assad, a mass murderer, who in 1982 was responsible for killing some 25,000 individuals in the village of Hama, Syria.

On one of these trips, Christopher was left sitting for several hours on the tarmac at the Damascus airport, while Assad met with Iranian visitors, who were in town arranging for the re-supply of weapons to the terrorist group Hizbollah, which were at that very time being unloaded into Syrian military trucks at the same airport, just a few feet away from where Christopher sat.

It was Christopher, by the way, who, according to author Daniel Wattenberg, had the following exchange with Colonel Charlie Beckwith, former commander of the U.S. Army's elite counter terrorist unit Delta Force, during a briefing with Jimmy Carter and his top national security advisors in preparation for the failed attempt to rescue U.S. hostages in Iran. After Beckwith said that he and his men intended to shoot anyone holding a hostage "right between the eyes . . . twice," Christopher reportedly asked "would you consider shooting them in the leg, or in the ankle or the shoulder?"

Recently, we have seen this feckless philosophy at work in the constant embarrassing pleas for friendship with Iran's murdering mullahs. For many observers, including myself, this is nauseating, when viewed in the light of convincing intelligence reports linking Iran to the terrorist bombing two years ago of the Khobar Towers apartment complex at the U.S. military base in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, in which 19 American servicemen were killed.

Further evidence of this mentality was on open display again last week when the *Washington Post* reported that "the Clinton administration has intervened secretly for months, most recently last Friday, to dissuade United Nations weapons teams from mounting surprise inspections in Iraq because it wished to avoid a new crisis with the Baghdad government." Specifically, according to the *Post*, the following happened.

As a team of specialists stood poised in Baghdad [Secretary of State Madeleine] Albright urged [the executive chairman of the U.N. Special Commission responsible for

Iraq's disarmament, Richard] Butler to rescind closely held orders for the team to mount "challenge inspections" at two sites where intelligence leads suggested they could uncover forbidden weapons components and documents describing Iraqi efforts to conceal them.

After a second high-level caution from Washington last Friday, Butler canceled the special inspection and ordered his team to leave Baghdad . . . U.S. efforts to forge a go-slow policy in Iraq have coincided with the announcement by the Baghdad government that it would halt nearly all cooperation with the U.S. commission, known as UNSCOM, and the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Administration.

In short, for a variety of reasons, those nation's (such as Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Sudan) that aid and abet the numerous anti-American international terrorist groups (such as the Islamic Jihad, the PLO, Hizbollah, Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front, the Sudanese National Front, and Egypt's Gamaa Islamiyah) have little to fear in the near future from the United States.

For starters, neither Bill Clinton himself, nor the Clinton administration foreign policy team, with its deep roots in the national self-loathing element of the 1960s anti-war movement and the dovish side of the Cold War, have ever had much stomach for war. And this is war.

In addition, the growing friendship between the Clinton White House and various Arab-American political groups, many of which have financial and organizational ties to Middle Eastern affiliates of such organizations as the PLO and Hamas, would indicate that the administration's reluctance to get tough with the nasty elements in the Middle East is unlikely to change.

Finally, because of years of neglect, the American intelligence community is in no position to launch a covert effort such as the one outlined above. So even if the Clinton administration were to begin tomorrow to develop such a capability (which it won't), the pieces wouldn't be in place until after Bill leaves office.

Nevertheless, as I said earlier, I believe the United States will eventually find the will and the tactical means to fight back. The cost in lives and property from this conflict will, I expect, be extraordinarily high, frighteningly high in fact.

This will be due in part to understandable delays in realizing and reacting to the nature of the threat. But more importantly, in my opinion, it will be due to a mixture of duplicity, stupidity and political cowardice among those who should have had the wisdom to understand that the World Trade Center bombing in February, 1993 was as much a declaration of war against America as was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December, 1941.

In the end, I am hopeful, if not entirely confident, that the United States will emerge victorious over this enemy sometime in the 21st century, as it did over numerous other fanatical, murderous and ideologically driven political movements during the 20th century.

By victory, I mean that Americans, American property and America's friends will be safe from violent terrorist actions in most parts of the world, including of course, in America's own cities.

More importantly, victory would mean that Americans would not have to sacrifice too much freedom in their efforts to secure safety, for if they give up too much of the one, the other won't be worth much.

My reluctance to predict full victory under this definition is based on the knowledge that militant Islam is a dangerous and dedicated enemy, driven by a religious fervor that breeds tenacity. Victory against such a foe won't be easy to achieve for a society in which polls show that more than half of the population is unable to grasp the important link between leadership and character, or to understand the importance to the concept of freedom of a judiciary system that holds the politically powerful to a high standard. We'll see.

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