

Leithner Letter No. 140-143 26 August - 26 November 2011

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

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

“Prayer During Wartime”
My Prayer Book
Concordia Publishing House (1957)

It is high time for Christians who defend the state, its leaders, its military and its wars to wake up and open their eyes and recognise some cold, hard facts:

- *The United States has become a rogue state, a pariah nation, an evil empire.*
- *The United States' military is the greatest force for evil in the world.*
- *The United States is the arms dealer to the world.*
- *The United States is not the world's policeman.*
- *The United States cannot redeem the world through violence.*
- *The United States is not the God-anointed protector of Israel that enjoys a special relationship with God.*
- *The United States Government is the greatest threat to American life, liberty, and property – not the leaders or the military or the people of Iraq, Iran, Syria, China, Russia, or Venezuela.*

[The American Republic] is crumbling. It is imperative that [Americans] return to the noninterventionist foreign policy of the Founders. Christians, of all people, should be leading the way.

Laurence Vance
[Christianity and War](#) (12 June 2008)

The Decade Since 11 September 2001: What Hath Our Stupid and Evil Rulers Wrought?

To what depths have today's rulers sunk? At the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg in 1945-46, Anglo-American élites subjected the most senior henchmen of Adolph Hitler, the murderers of millions, to something resembling the rule of law and a fair trial. In 1962, the Israeli secret service, Mossad, captured Adolph Eichmann (who during the Second World War managed the mass deportation of Jews to extermination camps) in Argentina and spirited him to Israel. He faced 15 criminal charges, including crimes against humanity and war crimes, and is the only person executed in Israel after conviction by a civilian court. Yet earlier this year, the U.S. Government didn't even consider the pretence of due process and a fair trial according to the rule of law. Instead, its military planned and executed the premeditated murder of Osama bin Laden (who, among other things, masterminded the murder of ca. 3,000 people on 11 September 2001).

Do Westerners deny any distinction between justice and revenge? Does the chasm that separates Law and Gospel completely elude them? It's imperative that a mass murderer, be he a National Socialist or an Islamic (or Christian or Jewish) fanatic or anybody else, receive a fair trial NOT because he "deserves" natural justice (in the British sense) or due process (in the American sense), but because if he does then chances are very good that ordinary people charged with lesser offences – particularly people who are neither white, Anglo-Saxon nor Protestant – will, too. But if the mass murderer isn't subjected to the rule of law, then who else won't be? Where's the dividing line? If we take the rule of law seriously, then no person is above the law. But if we don't, then agents of the state inevitably rise above the law (see, for example, Steven Greenhut, [But America IS a Police State](#) and Glenn Greenwald, [A Prime Aim of the Growing Surveillance State](#)).

Before 2 May 2011, one might have assumed that a graduate of Harvard Law School named Barack Obama would be at least dimly aware of these fundamental distinctions. But his [Remarks by the President on Osama Bin Laden](#) dispelled any such illusion. Obama said:

On September 11, 2001, in our time of grief, the American people ... [were] united in our resolve to protect our nation and to bring those who committed this vicious attack to justice. We quickly learned that the 9/11 attacks were carried out by al-Qaeda – an organization headed by Osama bin Laden, which had openly declared war on the United States and was committed to killing innocents in our country and around the globe. And so we went to war against al-Qaeda to protect our citizens, our friends, and our allies. Last August, after years of painstaking work by our intelligence community, I was briefed on a possible lead to bin Laden ... And finally, last week, I determined that we had enough intelligence to take action, and authorized an operation to get Osama bin Laden and bring him to justice.

Today, at my direction, the United States launched a targeted operation against that compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. A small team of Americans

carried out the operation with extraordinary courage and capability. No Americans were harmed. They took care to avoid civilian casualties. After a firefight, they killed Osama bin Laden and took custody of his body.

We must also reaffirm that the United States is not – and never will be – at war with Islam. I've made clear, just as President Bush did shortly after 9/11, that our war is not against Islam. Bin Laden was not a Muslim leader; he was a mass murderer of Muslims. Indeed, al-Qaeda has slaughtered scores of Muslims in many countries, including our own. So his demise should be welcomed by all who believe in peace and human dignity.

The American people did not choose this fight. It came to our shores, and started with the senseless slaughter of our citizens. After nearly 10 years of service, struggle, and sacrifice, we know well the costs of war ... Yet as a country, we will never tolerate our security being threatened, nor stand idly by when our people have been killed. We will be relentless in defense of our citizens and our friends and allies. We will be true to the values that make us who we are. And on nights like this one, we can say to those families who have lost loved ones to al-Qaeda's terror: Justice has been done.

Let us remember that we can do these things not just because of wealth or power, but because of who we are: one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Thank you. May God bless you. And may God bless the United States of America.

Many – but thankfully not all – Australians shared these warped sentiments.¹ According to the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, bin Laden's death provided "some small measure of justice" for the loved ones of the people who died on 11 Sep-

¹ In diametric contrast, "Rae and Jack Tompsett don't have much time for feelings of vengeance. No amount of revenge rhetoric after the death of Osama bin Laden is going to ease the daily pain caused by the absence of their son, Steve, from their lives. "It's nearly 10 years ago. We miss him to this day, and there are hundreds and thousands of families in the same position," Mrs Tompsett said yesterday from her Sydney home. The Tompsetts lost their son in the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York. He was one of 10 Australians to die in the World Trade Centre that day."

"One of the first things Mrs Tompsett said when speaking to *The Australian* yesterday was that she felt sorry for the hijackers who killed her son and thousands of others that morning. "I also feel sad for the young men who flew the planes, that they felt they were doing something good for God. They were very misled," she said. Mrs Tompsett said it was a relief bin Laden had finally been killed and that she 'can't be sorry,' but she does not think it will do much to stop Islamic terrorism ... Mrs Tompsett does not view bin Laden and al-Qa'ida as representing the true teachings of the Islamic faith. 'Islamic teaching is basically about charity and love and care for one another. Unfortunately, over the centuries some of it has been warped to include annihilating anyone who's not Muslim,' she said."

"Mr Knox said he personally had wanted to see bin Laden captured alive and put on trial. 'Only because that is what I see as true justice,' he said. 'Also, if you look at what's happening now, security for America now has to be enhanced because there may be retribution, and terror groups may want to avenge his death. My thinking is that this will never end. It is bittersweet for me. The death of Osama bin Laden doesn't really change anything, apart from bringing some partial closure. At the moment, there is not a lot of comfort'" (see Leo Shanahan and Michael Owen, "Families of Victims Find Shock Outweighs Relief," *The Australian*, 3 May 2011).

tember (see Paul Osborne, “bin Laden Death Is Justice for Victims: PM,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 May). According to the ABC ([Gillard and Howard Applaud bin Laden Killing](#), 2 May), “Julia Gillard has welcomed the death of Osama bin Laden. The Opposition leader, Tony Abbott, regards it as an achievement that vindicates Australia’s support for the US in Afghanistan. And the former Prime Minister, John Howard, who was in Washington when the Pentagon was attacked on September the 11th 2001, says he’s a happy man.” “The killing of Osama bin Laden is an epic event and a rallying triumph for the US,” wrote Paul Kelly in [Justice Delayed But Finally Delivered](#) (*The Australian*, 4 May 2011). And on 5 May, in [Don’t Cry for Osama bin Laden](#), *The Australian* editorialised:

Justice and the law are not always congruent and in the haze of war the law of self-preservation is likely to prevail. *The Australian* understands those who would have preferred for Osama bin Laden to be captured and forced to account for his crimes. It is true that we must demonstrate a strong commitment to standards of justice rather than descend towards the barbarity of those who attack our values. Yet much of the legalistic condemnation of bin Laden’s death smacks of pointless moral posturing.

Besides, there are pragmatic reasons why we are all better off without bin Laden surviving to create an international propaganda circus that would have endangered even more lives. We could have expected howls of protest over incarceration at Guantanamo Bay as the human rights lawyers demanded nothing less than an American civil trial. But bin Laden’s imprisonment would also have provided an ongoing rallying cry for terrorists in Afghanistan and further afield, possibly leading to the loss of more soldiers’ lives. And fears would have been raised around the world about his fanatical supporters attacking or taking hostage Americans, Australians or any Westerners, to keep the terror alive. In the pragmatic ways of the world, not the abstract realm of attention-seeking human rights lawyers, it is a good and just thing that bin Laden is dead.

Bret Stephens (“Vengeance Stirs a Wounded Nation: Osama Proves How American He Is,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 3 May 2011) offered perhaps the most uncompromising and unapologetic expression of these views – as well as the starkest description of the moral cesspool into which vengeance tempts us:

There was only one discordant note in Barack Obama’s otherwise masterly speech announcing the killing of Osama bin Laden. It came when the President invoked the word “justice” to describe what had just been done to the architect of 9/11. It wasn’t quite the word he was looking for. But actions speak louder than words.

Justice, as we in the West have come to know it, requires due process. It takes place in a courtroom under the supervision of a judge. Prosecutors must prove their case; defendants are entitled to a competent defence; rules of evidence and procedure must scrupulously be followed. A jury must render its verdict. Punishment can be neither cruel nor unusual.

As for bin Laden, what was meted out to him was vengeance. Vengeance, pure and simple, sweet and sound. Vengeance. Cathartic, uplifting, necessary and right. Got a problem with that? I don't. Nor did the people who poured into the streets on Sunday night to cheer outside the White House. Or the crowd I saw on Monday morning as I walked the perimeter of Ground Zero. "Why does everyone root for the avenger in feature films?" asks my friend Thane Rosenbaum, who teaches law at Fordham and is writing a book about revenge. "Is it because people are immoral in the dark or is it because we all realise that the avenger's quest and duty is righteous and true?" *Thane's point isn't that vengeance is better than justice. It's that there can be no true justice without vengeance* (italics added).

Americans didn't merely want to be secured against another attack – an achievement experienced only in the absence of fresh outrages and appreciated only in hindsight. Americans wanted vengeance. It's what they had wanted after Pearl Harbor, too: what took the Marines up Mt Suribachi, the Rangers up Pointe du Hoc. Revenge is a glue that holds a fractious nation together in the service of a great and arduous cause. Obama, for all his talk of justice, understands this. Or, in the education that is the presidency, he has come to understand it.

Here is something that Obama, more than most Western leaders, deeply understands: Symbolism matters. It matters that the ultimate symbol of Islamist rage did not wear a ring of invisibility. It matters that he was taken out not by a laser-guided bomb, but by US fighting men whose names we may someday know. If ever there was a doubt about just how American Obama is, Sunday's raid eliminates it. This was his finest hour. It's for the rest of us, avenged at last, to rejoice.

Is the tenth anniversary of the attacks of 11 September 2001 really a time to rejoice? Or is it instead a time to reflect, mourn, and ask that others forgive our (and our rulers') sins against them and that we forgive others' sins against us? The unspeakable truth is that the *War on Terror* is a war *of* terror waged upon innocent civilians in impoverished lands – lands which have been impoverished not least by relentless Western meddling. Moreover, the War on Terror is one of America's most comprehensive diplomatic, economic and military defeats, one which the U.S. Government has inflicted upon its own subjects. The terrible truth is that civilians and soldiers have died for nothing. In the torrents of discussion, chest-thumping and self-righteous state-worship which is likely to accompany the approach and wake of this tenth anniversary, it's very likely that these corollaries of this awful truth will be completely ignored:

- The events of 11 September 2001 ("9/11" in American parlance) were a temporary deviation ("outlier") rather than a permanent shift: they bore no relation to previous terrorist attacks; and thus far nothing like them has recurred. Indeed, outside the Middle East and South Asia, the incidence and toll of terrorist attacks has been falling since the early 1990s.

- Even including the toll of 9/11, terrorism (whether international or domestic) poses an extremely small and insignificant risk to the life of any individual American or resident of any Western country except Israel. If a long series of attacks struck the U.S., each on the scale of 9/11, the risk to any one American would still be far smaller than the risks (such as diabetes, heart disease, etc.) that cause people to shrug their shoulders rather than lose their heads.
- In 2005, almost one-half of Americans worried that they or their families could be killed by terrorists – a level of concern higher than it was four years earlier, even though no attacks occurred in the interim (or, for that matter, since 2005). That level vastly exceeds the concern about diabetes, heart disease and stroke – each of which are many times more likely to kill.
- It is very and perhaps insuperably difficult for terrorists to obtain, much less deploy, chemical, biological or – especially – nuclear weapons; and even if they did, the resulting toll of death would very likely be a small fraction of what our rulers allege. Even if terrorists launched a WMD attack whose death toll were many times that of 9/11, the risk to any one person would still be very small.

What Is Terrorism?

[According to Wikipedia](#), although there exists “no universally agreed, legally binding, criminal law definition of terrorism,” politicians and their poodles in the media and universities routinely use the term to refer to acts of violence which their perpetrators undertake in order to achieve specific ideological, political, religious or other ends. By this conception, terrorism is a means that the relatively weak pit against the comparatively strong. People and organisations whom Western governments label “terrorists” intend, among other things, to create fear by targeting or disregarding the safety of civilians. After the attacks of 11 September 2001, al-Qaeda overtook the Irish Republican Army, Hamas and Hezbollah as the world’s most infamous (in Western eyes) terrorist group.

Bruce Hoffman (*Inside Terrorism*, Columbia University Press, 2006, p. 41) specifies some attributes of this conventional conception of terrorism. He concludes that it

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

Hoffman’s list conveniently excludes acts of [state terrorism](#) and war. Why does it exculpate the state? Like the term “liberalism,” which once promoted the natural

rights of individuals against Leviathan but now glorifies the utilitarian “rights” of the state over its subjects, the mainstream’s conception of terrorism distracts attention from the fact that, historically, “terrorism” denoted the diametrically opposite idea, i.e., acts of violence perpetrated for ideological reasons by the strong – namely the state – against the weak (namely its subjects).² Wikipedia notes that “[this conventional] concept of terrorism may itself be controversial as it is often used by state authorities (and individuals with access to state support) to delegitimize political or other opponents, and potentially to legitimize the state’s own use of armed force against opponents (such use of force may itself be described as “terror” by opponents of the state).”³

Senior American military officials – including [William Odom](#), a three-star general who was Director of the National Security Administration under Ronald Reagan – have frankly acknowledged that the U.S. Government has long resorted to state terrorism, and have thus noted the consequent inherent hypocrisy of the conventional use of the term “terrorism.” In [American Hegemony: How to Use It, How to Lose It](#), Odom wrote:

As many critics have pointed out, terrorism is not an enemy. It is a tactic. Because the United States itself has a long record of supporting terrorists and using terrorist tactics, the slogans of today’s war on terrorism merely makes the United States look hypocritical to the rest of the world. A prudent American president would end the present policy of “sustained hysteria” over potential terrorist attacks ... [would] treat terrorism as a serious but not a strategic problem, encourage Americans to regain their confidence, and refuse to let al-Qaeda keep us in a state of fright.

It’s hardly just Americans: why, more generally, do Western politicians, journalists and academics – who, almost to a man, are starry-eyed worshippers of the welfare-warfare state – regard terrorism as an act of violence perpetrated by “non-state actors”? If the last dot point were omitted from Hoffman’s list, wouldn’t the bulk of Western foreign policy be indistinguishable from terrorism? Save for this caveat, wasn’t the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in March 2003 an act of terrorism? Indeed, wasn’t it a war crime?⁴

² See in particular Myra Williamson, *Terrorism, War and International Law: The Legality of the Use of Force Against Afghanistan In 2001*, Ashgate Publishing, 2009, p. 38.

³ See also Alex P. Schmid, “The Definition of Terrorism,” *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*, Routledge, 2011 p. 39.

⁴ A war crime is a general label used to describe one of three specific crimes enumerated and described in Article 6 of the Charter of the [International Military Tribunal](#) (IMT). Immediately after the end of the Second World War, the governments of the “Big Four” (i.e., the U.S.A., Soviet Union, Britain and France) established the IMT in order to prosecute the leaders of National Socialist Germany and its allies. The Tribunal’s Charter, published on 8 August 1945 (ironically, just hours after the nuclear explosion at Hiroshima and just hours before the second detonation at Nagasaki), declared in Article 6: “The following acts, or any of them, are crimes coming within the jurisdiction of the Tribunal for which there shall be individual responsibility:”

In light of the voluminous evidence that now crowds the public domain, a strong case can be made that in 2001-2003 American, British, Australian and other “leaders” and their military and civilian advisers engaged in or acquiesced to the “planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression” – that is, they plotted and committed a war crime. At the time it was obvious (see in particular Justin Raimondo, [“The Lying Game,”](#) 7 February 2003), and today is as plain as the nose on one’s face, that neither Saddam Hussein nor the Iraqi military posed the remotest threat to any Western country; nor did either Saddam or his military have the faintest connection to the attacks on 11 September 2001. The many revelations by former insiders, coupled with the [Downing Street Memo](#), [Lewis \(“Scooter”\) Libby indictment](#) and numerous other sources, leave little doubt that these insiders intentionally deceived the world in order to invade a country that posed no threat to anybody except its own unfortunate subjects.

Accordingly, and by the precedent set at Nuremberg, the misleading and ever-changing rationales uttered before, during and after the invasion of Iraq exonerate nobody. Nor does the evasive special pleading uttered after the fact (“we acted on the best information available,” ex-Prime Minister John Howard has bleated repeatedly since the WMDs failed to materialise). The precedent self-righteously established by America and Britain at Nuremberg in 1946 condemned them in 2003: to invade a country that has neither the means nor the intention to attack you – whether or not the invaders know it when they plan and execute their invasion –

-
- *“Crimes against Peace:* namely, planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression, or a war in violation of international treaties, agreements or assurances, or participation in a Common Plan or Conspiracy for the accomplishment of any of the foregoing.” In plain English, to invade a nation that has never threatened you and does not presently threaten you is a crime against peace.
 - *“War Crimes:* namely, violations of the laws or customs of war. Such violations shall include, but not be limited to, murder, ill-treatment or deportation to slave labour or for any other purpose of civilian population of or in occupied territory, murder or ill-treatment of prisoners of war or persons on the seas, killing of hostages, plunder of public or private property, wanton destruction of cities, towns, or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity ...

Article 6 warns: “Leaders, organisers, instigators, and accomplices participating in the formulation or execution of a Common Plan or Conspiracy to commit any of the foregoing crimes are responsible for all acts performed by any persons in execution of such plan.” Section 7 states “The official position of defendants, whether as Heads of State or responsible officials in Government departments, shall not be considered as freeing them from responsibility or mitigating punishment.” And Section 8 cautions: “The fact that the defendant acted pursuant [to an order of a superior] shall not free him from responsibility ...”

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

is a crime against peace. *In other words, whether it is waged by Nazis or neocons, a “pre-emptive” war is necessarily a crime against peace and thus a war crime.* The ironic and rather pathetic fact that between 1991 and 2003 Saddam Hussein was virtually the only person ([Hans Blix](#) completes the list) who spoke truth to power about WMDs in Iraq speaks volumes about the determination of Western politicians and their lackeys to twist information and dupe their subjects in order to indulge their inflexible prejudices.

**Just the Tip of the Grotesque Iceberg:
Some Recent Victims of Western Democratic Aggression**

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

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

Is the West Waging a War on Terror or a War of Terror?

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

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

On 16 September 2001, George W. Bush first uttered the phrase “war on terror.” On 20 September, during a televised address to a joint session of Congress, he launched it: “Our ‘war on terror’ begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.” Barack Obama has rarely used the phrase, but in his inaugural address on 20 January 2009 he declared: “Our nation is at war, against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred.” In March 2009, his administration requested that American military personnel avoid the use of the term, and that instead they adopt the phrase “Overseas Contingency Operation” (see Scott Wilson and Al Kamen, “‘Global War on Terror’ Is Given New Name,” *The Washington Post*, 25 March 2009).

Given that this war’s enemy is at best indistinct and at worst unidentifiable, and that military means have historically seldom been able to quell terrorism – and, indeed, have often worsened it – its critics have contended that the term “war” is misconceived.⁵ In Britain, the Director of Public Prosecutions and head of the Crown Prosecution Service, Ken McDonald, has stated that the perpetrators of acts of terrorism such as the 7 July 2005 bombings in London are not “soldiers” or “combatants” in a war, but “inadequates” for whom the criminal justice system is the proper jurisdiction (“There Is No War on Terror in the UK, says DPP,” *The Times*, 24 January 2007). On 19 September 2008, the RAND Corporation presented to the United States House Armed Services Committee the results of a comprehensive study entitled [Defeating Terrorist Groups](#). It concluded “by far the most effective strategy against religious groups has been the use of local police and intelligence services, which were responsible for the end of 73% of [terrorist] groups since 1968.” RAND recommended that the military “should generally resist being drawn into combat operations in Muslim countries where its presence is likely to increase terrorist recruitment.”

Other critics, such as Francis Fukuyama, have echoed William Odom and go much further: because “terrorism” is not an enemy but a tactic, a “war on terror” obscures vital differences between conflicts and launches a war that by definition is unwinnable. As the linguist George Lakoff has argued ([War on Terror, Rest in](#)

⁵ See, for example, Todd Richissin, “‘War on Terror’ Difficult to Define,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 2 September 2004.

[Peace](#)), terror is an abstract noun (concept). Therefore a war on terror is a logical impossibility – and strong evidence of its proponents’ woolly thinking. “Wars” on ambushes, seeking and turning flanks, patrolling the perimeter, maintaining reconnaissance, creating and using obstacles and defences, using ground to one’s best advantage, etc. – not to mention [forks](#), [skewers](#), [batteries](#), [discovered attacks](#), [undermining](#), [overloading](#), [deflection](#), [pins](#) and [interference](#) – are equally laughable. Lakoff concludes: “Terror cannot be destroyed by weapons or signing a peace treaty. A war on terror has no end.” During a visit to the U.S. on 30 July 2007, the newly-appointed British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown (just as much an American sock puppet as his predecessor, Tony Blair) let the cat out of the bag when he defined the War on Terror as “a generational battle.”

George W. Bush effectively conceded that the War on Terror will be perpetual and therefore unwinnable. No matter how many terrorists one captures or how many terrorist groups one extinguishes, if one addresses symptoms rather than causes of terrorism then new terrorists and groups will constantly arise. In August 2005, the Oxford Research Group reported “al-Qa’ida and its affiliates remain active and effective, with a stronger support base and a higher intensity of attacks than before 9/11 ... Far from winning the ‘war on terror’, the second George W. Bush administration is maintaining policies that ... are actually increasing violent anti-Americanism.” Accordingly, to declare (as Bush did) that the war on terror “will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated” is to concede that it will never end.

The notion of a war against terrorism – and the underlying insistence that terrorism is an act of war against the state rather than a crime against the person – is not just logically untenable: it ensured that, like the state’s other wars such as the [War on Drugs](#) and [War on Poverty](#), it would fail abysmally. The War *on* Terror has become a war *of* terror – that is, an crazed entitlement program for the neocon death brigades. According to Dana Priest and William M. Arkin (“A Hidden World, Growing Beyond Control,” *The Washington Post*, 19 July 2010), “some 1,271 government organisations and 1,931 private companies work on programs related to counterterrorism, homeland security and intelligence in about 10,000 locations across the United States.” Don’t you feel safer already?

What Does Al-Qaeda Want?

In “Sizing Up the New Toned-Down Bin Laden” (*The New York Times*, 19 December 2004), Don Van Natta, Jr. wrote:

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

The tape indicated that bin Laden has apparently moved the fomenting of a revolution in his Saudi homeland toward the top of his lengthy and ambi-

tious wish list, which also includes the reversal of American foreign policy in the Middle East, the retreat of the American military from the Arabian Peninsula and the creation of a Palestinian homeland.

Perhaps most striking is bin Laden's expression of frustration. Like any politician on the stump, bin Laden craves the ability to deliver an unfiltered message to his audience. Speaking directly to Americans in the pre-election address, he complained that his rationale for waging a holy war against the United States was repeatedly mischaracterized by President Bush and consequently misunderstood by most Americans.

To change this, bin Laden is testing what he apparently believes are more mainstream themes, while trying to dislodge the entrenched American view of him as a terrorist hell-bent on destroying America and all it stands for. In the pre-election address, bin Laden said Mr. Bush was wrong to "claim that we hate freedom." He added: "If so, then let him explain to us why we don't strike, for example, Sweden." That remark surprised some counter-terrorism officials and terrorist experts, who said the Al-Qaeda leader rarely injects sarcasm into his public pronouncements. They took it as a signal that he was trying to broaden his appeal, particularly to moderate Muslims and possibly even some Americans.

"Osama is not a man given to humour, but when he told this joke about Sweden, I think it showed his frustration that Americans are not listening to him," said Michael Scheuer, a former senior C.I.A. official who tracked bin Laden for years and is the author of *Imperial Hubris*. "We are being told by the president and others that al-Qaeda attacked us because they despise who we are and what we think and how we live. But Osama's point is, it's not that at all. They don't like what we do."

Bin Laden is a true believer, but he isn't stupid. He's obviously an intelligent man, clearly familiar with cost-benefit analysis ... He mocked the United States' budget and trade deficits, saying that Al-Qaeda is committed "to continuing this policy in bleeding American to the point of bankruptcy." And he said that the 9/11 attacks, which cost Al-Qaeda a total of \$500,000, have cost the United States more than \$500 billion, "according to the lowest estimate" by a research organization in London that he cited by name. "It all shows that the real loser is – you," he told Americans, according to a transcript by al-Jazeera, the satellite network.⁶

⁶ Joseph Stiglitz, former chief economist of the World Bank and a recipient of the Bank of Sweden Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel (which is commonly but erroneously called the "Nobel Prize in Economics"), has concluded that the total costs of the Iraq War on the U.S. economy will be at least \$3 trillion. "The figure we arrive at is more than \$3 trillion. Our calculations are based on conservative assumptions ... Needless to say, this number represents the cost only to the United States. It does not reflect the enormous cost to the rest of the world, or to Iraq" (see Linda Bilmes and Joseph Stiglitz, "The Iraq War Will Cost Us \$3 Trillion, and Much More," *The Washington Post*, 9 March 2008).

Those figures are significantly greater – to put it mildly – than the ones published shortly before the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq. In an interview on 16 March 2003, for example, U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney confidently prophesied "every analysis said this war itself would cost about \$80 billion,

A book by a political scientist at the University of Chicago, Robert Pape, entitled *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (Random House, 2005), flatly contradicts many of the mainstream's most cherished and fervent beliefs. Based on an analysis of every known case of suicide terrorism from 1980 to 2003 (315 attacks as part of 18 campaigns), Pape concludes that there is "little connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, or any one of the world's religions ... Rather, what nearly all suicide terrorist attacks have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland" (p. 4). "The taproot of suicide terrorism is nationalism," he argues; it is "an extreme strategy for national liberation" (pp. 79–80). Pape's research has examined groups ranging from al-Qaeda to the Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers. Notably, he also substantiates a growing body of literature that finds that the majority of suicide terrorists do not come from an impoverished or uneducated background, but rather have middle class origins and a significant level of education.

Why do terrorists attack the West? Not because we're here, but because our rulers and their military forces are over there. Terrorists retaliate against the West not because we're Westerners, but because our political masters relentlessly meddle, oppress, shoot, bombard and otherwise help to make life (particularly in the Middle East) even more miserable than local despotic governments have already made it.⁷ In the prophetic words of Congressman Howard Buffett (Republican, Nebraska, *The Congressional Record*, 1947, p. 2216),

Even if it were desirable, America is not strong enough to police the world by military force. If that attempt is made, the blessings of liberty will be replaced by tyranny and coercion at home. Our Christian ideals cannot be exported to other lands by dollars and guns. Persuasion and example are the methods taught by the Carpenter of Nazareth, and if we believe in Christianity we should try to advance our ideals by his methods. We cannot practice might and force abroad and retain freedom at home. We cannot talk world cooperation and practice power politics.

On 11 March, 2005, *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* (an independent pan-Arab daily newspaper published in London since 1989) released extracts from [Saif al-Adel's](#) document (whose genesis predates the attacks on 11 September 2001) entitled [Al-Qaeda's Strategy to the Year 2020](#). This strategy comprises five stages:

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

recovery of Baghdad, perhaps of Iraq, about \$10 billion per year. We should expect as American citizens that this would cost at least \$100 billion for a two-year involvement" (for a transcript, go to <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bush/cheneymeetthepress.htm>).

⁷ See in particular three books by Chalmers Johnson. The first is *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (Holt Paperbacks, 2004); the second is *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (Metropolitan Books, 2004); and the third is *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic* (Metropolitan Books, 2007).

3. Expand the conflict to neighbouring countries, and engage the U.S. in a long and widespread war of attrition.
4. Develop al-Qaeda into an ideology and set of operating principles that can be loosely franchised in other countries without requiring direct command and control; and via these franchises incite attacks against the U.S. (and countries allied to it) until they withdraw from the conflict.
5. Bleed the U.S. economy (and those of the nations whose militaries run fools errands for Uncle Sam) so severely that it finally collapses under the strain of too many military engagements in too many places; and more generally to prompt the worldwide economic system which depends upon the largesse of the U.S. also to collapse – leading to global political instability, which in turn will allegedly beget a global jihad led by Al-Qaeda and a Wahhabi Caliphate will then be installed across the world.⁸

Regarding the economic collapse of the U.S., Abdel Bari Atwan (*The Secret History of Al-Qaeda*, University of California Press, 2006, p. 221) concludes: “If this sounds far-fetched, it is sobering to consider that this [strategy] virtually describes the downfall of the Soviet Union.”

Odds Are, You Don’t Know How Miniscule the Odds Are

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

According to the [RAND-MIPT terrorism database](#) – which seems to be the most comprehensive available – 10,119 international terrorist incidents occurred around

⁸ According to Michael Shuerer (*Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror*, Potomac Books, 2004) Osama bin Laden has repeatedly demanded that the U.S. make five changes to its foreign policy: i) end all aid to Israel; ii) withdraw military forces from the Arabian Peninsula and all Muslim territory; iii) end all involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq; iv) end U.S. support for the oppression of Muslims in China, Russia, India and elsewhere; and v) restore Muslim control of the Islamic world’s energy resources for the benefit of Muslims. A sixth point is the replacement of U.S.-backed regimes in the Muslim world with Islamic ones, but that is really an exhortation on the Muslim population.

the world between 1968 and mid-2007. Those attacks took the lives of 14,790 people (an average of 1.5 people per incident), and thereby extracted an average annual worldwide death toll of 379. Clearly, what the world and particularly Americans saw on 11 September 2001 bore absolutely no relation to what had occurred previously – or what has transpired since. Terrorism (like road crashes, domestic violence, etc.) is dreadful, and every death it inflicts is a crime (as opposed to an act of war). But 379 deaths per year is, on a worldwide scale and relative to the total number of deaths from all causes, a microscopic number. In the U.S. alone in 2003, 497 people accidentally suffocated in bed; 396 were unintentionally electrocuted; 515 drowned in swimming pools; police officers killed 347 and garden-variety criminals (that is, crims other than terrorists) murdered 16,503 Americans (for background and elaboration, see [Injury Facts](#) published by the American Safety Council).

It's also important to emphasise that the average worldwide number of people killed annually in terrorist incidents, 379, vastly overstates the actual risk faced by Americans, Britons and other residents of Western countries. That's because most of these deaths occur in distant (to most Westerners) and tumultuous (by Western standards) regions like Kashmir and Sri Lanka. In North America between 1968 and 2007, all terrorist incidents combined – including the attacks on 11 September 2001 – killed 3,765 people. That's only slightly more than the number of Americans killed whilst riding a motorbike in the single year 2003. So why have politicians not declares a War on Motorbikes? In Western Europe, the death toll from terrorism between 1968 and April 2007 was 1,233. That's an average of 32 deaths per year – a mere 6% of the number of lives (500) that experts believe are lost every year in Europe to naturally-occurring radon gas. To this statistically much more significant risk, very few people pay the slightest attention – and outraged politicians have commenced no War on Radon.

In [There is Nothing to Fear but the TSA Itself](#), [The Dollar Vigilante](#) asks:

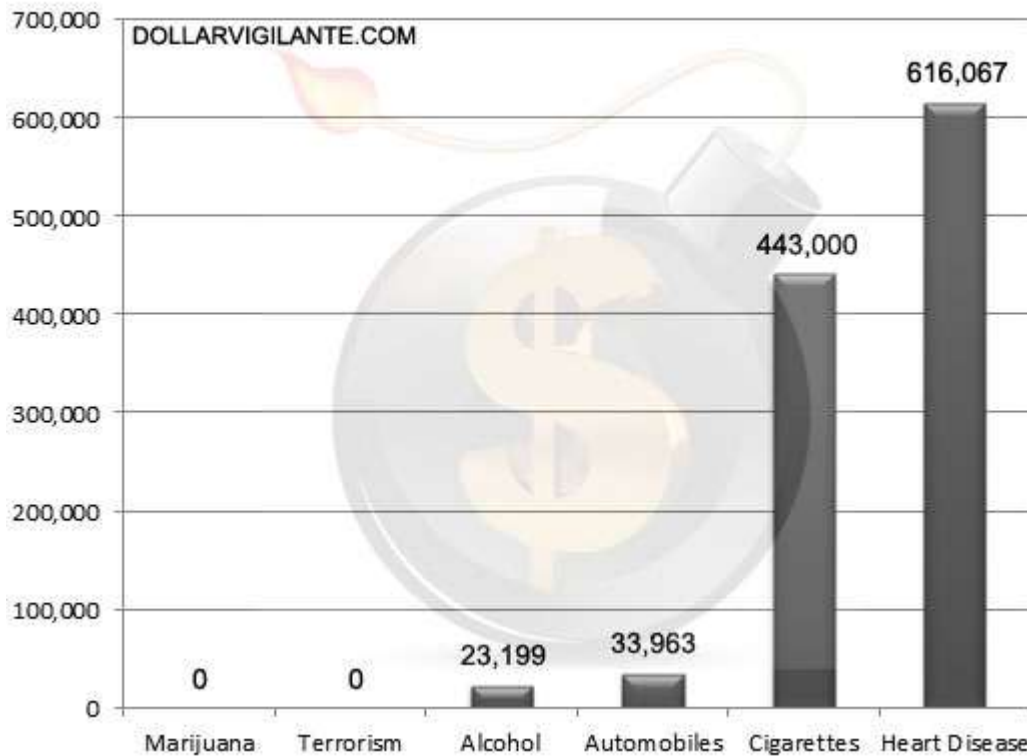
What ever happened to the Home of the Brave? If the average American's views and priorities are any indication, that should be changed to the Home of the Brainwashed and Scared.

In a [poll done late last year](#), the majority of Americans support all of the [Transportation Safety Administration's] procedures. Many state that they support the invasive measures because they fear terrorism. Yet, what were the total deaths in 2009, for example, from terrorism in the US? Zero. Total deaths from heart disease was over 600,000. Total deaths from cigarettes was over 400,000. Alcohol? Direct deaths of over 23,000 ... probably related deaths into the hundreds of thousands.

Yet, many people will sit at McDonalds eating a Big Mac, fries and a coke and smoking a cigarette while preparing for a night out of binge drinking and tell you that they are scared of terrorists and that we need to fight the war on terrorism. They will also tell you that we need to continue the war on drugs because drugs are dangerous. Total deaths from marijuana in 2009? Zero.

Talk about having your priorities backwards. The things that really do kill people are never worried about. The things that almost never kill people are constantly presented by the Government and the media as dire threats and trillions of your dollars are spent fighting against them – putting hundreds of thousands in jail and killing millions of people worldwide - not to mention bankrupting the US Government and many of its people in the process. In order to match the total killed by heart disease and cigarettes every year, 4,526 Boeing 757 airliners would have to be exploded, killing all of the 234 passengers aboard to equal the same amount of deaths. That, by the way, is almost every 757 that has ever been built (6,638). Why don't the US mainstream media lead off every newscast by saying, "Today, 1,687 were killed by poor diet and a lack of exercise and 1,213 were killed from smoking cigarettes. And in other news, zero people died today from terrorism or marijuana"?

TOTAL DEATHS IN THE US (2009)



In 2005, the U.S. Government requested that K.T. Bogen and E.D. Jones of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory conduct a comprehensive statistical analysis of the RAND-MIPT database (see "Risks of Mortality and Morbidity from Worldwide Terrorism: 1968–2004, *Risk Analysis*, 26:1, February 2006, pp. 45-59). Bogen and Jones concluded that, for the sake of a clear understanding of the risk posed by terrorism, the world should be divided into two areas: the State of Israel and Everywhere Else. In Israel, terrorism is indeed a serious threat – and among Palestinians, the Israeli military is an even bigger threat. In Israel, the chance of injury or death through terrorism over a lifetime of 70 years ranged between 0.1% and 1% -- which is high enough that most people in that country will know someone who has been injured, if not killed, in a terrorist attack. But in the

rest of the world, the lifetime risk of injury or death is between 1 in 10,000 and 1 in one million. Compare those odds to an American's lifetime risk of being killed by lightning (1 in 79,746), being killed by a venomous plant or animal (1 in 39,873), drowning in a bathtub (1 in 11,289), committing suicide (1 in 119) or dying in a car crash (1 in 84). Bogen and Jones observed that if the risk posed by terrorism were considered in a public-health context, it would certainly fall within the range that regulators called *de minimis* – in plain English, “too small for concern.” Why, then, the ruinously expensive and unspeakably costly (in terms of human life) war of terror?

But You're Ignoring the Existential Threat of WMDs!

Few Americans (and Britons, etc.) and few Western politicians, regardless of their partisan stripe, accept these premises and reasoning. Hence they reject the conclusion that terrorism poses a minimal risk to Westerners. Instead, they maintain that this conclusion ignores the “real risk” of terrorism. Like a nuclear war, they insist that terrorism is an [existential risk](#). The statistics that demonstrate that terrorism isn't a major killer – and at worst is a very minor risk – are irrelevant. The declining incidence of terrorist attacks around the world since the early 1990s in most parts of the world is also irrelevant. The fact that 9/11 was very unlikely to succeed, almost didn't and probably wouldn't if it were tried again – that, too, is irrelevant. What, then, IS relevant?

The mainstream shouts in unison: “if terrorists obtain weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), then they will inflict the sort of devastation that in the past only the state's armies, navies and air forces could wreak!” This risk, they say, is unprecedented; accordingly, they insist that the risk of terrorism vastly exceeds virtually all others. Thus terrorism is an “existential risk” – one which has the potential to destroy, or drastically restrict, human civilisation. According to Michael Ignatieff, first an academic (at Cambridge, Oxford and Harvard, among other places) and subsequently the man who – far more than Stephen Harper – drove the Liberal Party of Canada into the dust, and is an educated fool if there ever was one,

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

An attack of this sort is already in the realm of possibility. The recipes for making ultimate weapons are on the Internet, and the matériel required is available for the right price. Democracies live by free markets, but a free market in everything – enriched uranium, ricin, anthrax – will mean the death of democracy. Armageddon is being privatized, and unless we shut down these markets, doomsday will be for sale. Sept. 11, for all its horror, was a conventional attack. We have the best of reasons to fear the fire next time (see “Lesser Evils,” *The New York Times Magazine*, 2 May 2004).

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

In principle, terrorists could obtain viruses, nuclear weapons and the like from black markets; realistically, however, such scenarios are the stuff of James Bond movies and silly newspaper articles (not least Ignatieff's) trafficking in the realm of rumor and speculation. Terrorists could also obtain WMDs from nations that possess such weapons and would like to see Israel and the U.S. suffer. But the henchmen of any country pondering such a move has to consider the distinct possibility that if their role in such an attack were uncovered, then their country would quickly be reduced to rubble – either by Israel's conventional or nuclear forces. That's a significant deterrent: Osama bin Laden and his followers may desire martyrdom, but Kim Jong Il and Iranian and other dictators do not. And they must worry that “the surrogate cannot be trusted, even to the point of using the weapon against its sponsor,” noted the 1999 report of the Gilmore Committee.⁹ These considerations have for decades prevented states from supplying terrorists with nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. There's no reason to think that these disincentives will change in a hurry.

That leaves the DIY option. Many media reports – like that of the bloody fool and wrecker of the Liberal Party, Michael Ignatieff – imply (or assert) that WMDs can be manufactured with little more than an undergraduate degree, a recipe hacked from the Internet and some spare space in the garage. In actual fact, found the Gilmore Committee,

The hurdles faced by terrorists seeking to develop true weapons of mass casualties and mass destruction are more formidable than is often imagined.

This report does not argue that terrorists cannot produce and disseminate biological and chemical agents capable of injuring or indeed killing relatively small numbers of persons ... or perhaps inflicting serious casualties even in the hundreds. The point is that creating truly mass-casualty weapons – capable of killing tens of thousands, much less in the thousands – requires ad-

⁹ The U.S. Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Attorney General, the Secretary of Energy, the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency entered into a contract with the RAND National Defense Research Institute (NDRI), to establish the [Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction](#). Commonly known as the Gilmore Committee or the Gilmore Commission, it released its first report in 1999 and its fifth and final report in December 2003.

vanced university training in appropriate scientific and technical disciplines, obtainable but nonetheless sophisticated equipment and facilities, the ability to carry out rigorous testing to ensure a weapon's effectiveness, and the development and employment of effective means of dissemination. [These demands are so formidable that they] appear, at least for now, to be beyond the reach not only of the vast majority of existent terrorist organizations but also of many established nation-states.

Similarly, a report entitled [Weapons of Mass Destruction – the Terrorist Threat](#) and issued by the Congressional Research Service in 1999 concluded

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

The obsession with Islamists has clouded judgment: people and politicians in the West have forgotten (perhaps they never learnt) that the first religious zealots to obtain and deploy WMDs belonged to the Japanese cult of [Aum Shinrikyo](#). Led by Shoko Asahara, Aum was fixated on the idea of inflicting mass-casualty terrorist attacks in hopes of sparking an apocalyptic war. Aum's resources were formidable. At its peak, the cult boasted a membership of 60,000 and offices in Australia, Germany, Russia and the U.S. It had at least several hundred million dollars of cash, and perhaps as much as \$1 billion of assets. And it had highly skilled members: Aum went to the best universities in Japan and aggressively courted post-graduate students in biology, chemistry, physics and engineering.

Aum also gave them some of the finest equipment and facilities money could buy. At one point, its membership included 20 scientists working on biological weapons, and another 80 investigated chemical weapons. Aum also sought nuclear weapons, and even purchased a 500,000-acre sheep station in a remote part of Australia with plans to mine uranium and ship it to Japan where, according to the Gilmore Committee, "scientists using laser enrichment technology would convert it into weapons-grade nuclear material." In Russia, the group bought large quantities of small arms "and is known to have been in the market for advanced weaponry, such as tanks, jet fighters, surface-to-surface rocket launchers and even a tactical nuclear weapon."

In short, Aum overlooked no opportunity to wreak mass havoc. When in October 2002 an outbreak of the [Ebola virus](#) occurred in central Africa, Shoko Asahara personally led 40 of his followers to the region on what was allegedly a "humanitarian mission." Officials now believe Aum attempted to collect samples of the virus so it could be mass-produced in Japan. Their efforts failed. *This was hardly Aum's only failure.* The cult's first known bio-terror attack involved the spraying of botulinum toxin – the extremely deadly substance that causes botulism – from

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

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

On 27 June 1994, Aum's members drove a converted refrigerator truck into a residential neighbourhood of Matsumoto, Japan. Inside, terrorists activated a computer-controlled system that heated liquid sarin to a vapour and blew it into the air with a fan. The wind conditions were perfect, slowly nudging the deadly cloud toward windows left open to the warm night air. Seven people died and more than 140 suffered serious injuries. On 20 March 1995, Aum tried another delivery method. Five members dressed in business suits and carrying umbrellas stepped aboard five different trains in the heart of Tokyo's notoriously-crowded subway system. In all, they carried 11 plastic bags filled with sarin. Placing the bags on the floor, the terrorists poked holes in them with their umbrellas and fled the trains. Three of the 11 bags failed to rupture. The other eight spilled roughly 159 ounces of sarin. As the liquid spread, it evaporated and vapors rose. Twelve people died. Five more were critically injured but survived. Another 37 were deemed severely injured, while 984 suffered modest symptoms.

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

The Gilmore Committee concluded:

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

Crucial to this failure, the Committee noted, is the atmosphere within a conspiracy fuelled by mania: “Aum scientists, socially and physically isolated and ruled by an increasingly paranoid leader, became divorced from reality and unable to make sound judgments.”

For terrorists with dreams of apocalypse, this is very discouraging; for exactly this reason, it should comfort the rest of us. Al-Qaeda and other Islamist terrorists possess very few of Aum's advantages. They lack the money, infrastructure and equipment, the freedom from scrutiny and the ability to travel openly. Most importantly, they do not have the scientists – al-Qa'ida has tried to recruit them but has consistently failed, which is the main reason they have never shown even a fraction of Aum's technical sophistication. The one factor they share with the Japanese cult is the hothouse atmosphere that crippled Aum's efforts. Apparently, dispassionate boffins and crazed terrorists don't play well together.

Aum's experience demonstrates that the probability of mass-casualty terrorist attacks using chemical or biological weapons is greater than zero, but that it is far closer to zero than to 1.0. Terrorists quickly encounter many serious – and virtually insuperable – technical and logistical obstacles if they start down this path. That's a compelling reason why even the most sophisticated and ruthless terrorists have stuck most exclusively to bombs and bullets – or, in the case of the worst terrorist attack in history, box cutters and aeroplane tickets.

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

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

Yet the neocons remain unfazed. “The problem here,” [Condoleeza Rice infamously said](#), “is that there will always be some uncertainty about how quickly [Saddam] can acquire nuclear weapons. But we don’t want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud.” Similarly, Barack Obama plays the fear card like an old hand: he has identified nuclear terrorism as “a threat that rises above all others in urgency ... There is no graver danger to global security than the threat of nuclear terrorism and no more immediate task for the international community than to address that threat.” What is the probability that a terrorist cell launches a nuclear attack that destroys an American – or any other – city? It’s not possible to calculate. Why not? Because it has never happened and thus there are no numbers to crunch. In the absence of data, all we can do is look at the facts about the construction and availability of nuclear weapons and make a judgment call.

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

As for DIY, it’s important to emphasise that it’s simply not something that the average geek can do in the average suburban garage. “Building a nuclear device capable of producing mass destruction presents Herculean challenges for terrorists and indeed even for states with well-funded and sophisticated programs,” the Gilmore Committee wrote. In the 1980s, Saddam Hussein poured Iraq’s vast oil-funded resources into a nuclear program. But before the first Gulf War he failed to produce even a single weapon, and subsequent sanctions scuttled his ambitions. Apartheid South Africa did build a small nuclear arsenal, but “it took scientists and engineers – who were endowed with a large and sophisticated infrastructure – four years to build their first gun-type system (the crudest form of nuclear bomb).” That’s a far cry from the babble and vast exaggeration of Graham Allison ([Don’t Underestimate Nuclear Terror Threat](#), 9 October 2009).

And yet, however unlikely and implausible it is, it could happen. “What then?” gloat the neocons as if they’ve presented a trump card. By most accounts, a successful nuclear detonation in an urban centre would kill in the order of 100,000 people. Given such a death toll, the chance of any randomly-selected American being killed in the explosion would be 0.033%, or 1 in 3,000. As for the collective risk, a death toll of 100,000 is not much more than the number of Americans killed each year by diabetes – 75,000 – and it is roughly equal to the number of American lives lost annually to accidents or to infections contracted in hospitals.

So simply in terms of number of lives lost, a nuclear terrorist attack would certainly be tragic but hardly apocalyptic.

A nuclear terrorist attack would inflict massive damage, but the claim of George Tenet (a former Director of the CIA and another Evil Zero in a long line of fear mongers and fools who littered the Bush, Blair and Howard governments) that it would “destroy” the American economy is an absurd exaggeration. Again, the best disproof of Tenet’s laughable claim is the aftermath of 9-11 itself. The attack wasn’t on the scale of a nuclear detonation, of course, but the terrorists did paralyse the most important city in the U.S., halt all air travel and bring American commerce and society to a shuddering halt. Stock markets plunged – but within 40 days the DJIA returned to its level on 10 September. “If you look closely at the trend lines since 9/11,” William Dobson wrote in *Foreign Policy* magazine on the fifth anniversary of the attacks, “what is remarkable is how *little* the world has changed.” American exports continued to rise steadily, as did the level of debt, and although the value of global trade dipped slightly in 2001 from \$8 trillion to \$7.8 trillion – it was a bad year even prior to the attacks – it “came racing back, increasing every subsequent year to \$12 trillion in 2005.” The American economy was not devastated, nor was globalisation reversed.

Another demonstration of this point came on 29 August 2005, when Hurricane Katrina breached the levees protecting New Orleans. More than 1,500 people died, and most of the rest fled. The parallel with a nuclear strike is far from exact, but an American city was suddenly smashed and abandoned. The costs in economic (as opposed to human) terms have been estimated at \$80 billion. Neither the storm nor its aftermath crippled the American economy.

All the Groundless Fear Mongering, All the Bloody Time

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

That people’s angst was wildly unrealistic in the immediate aftermath of the attacks is understandable. But why did Americans’ fear rise as time passed? To understand that, we must revisit 12 September 2001 and George W. Bush’s declaration that the events of the previous day were “more than acts of terror. They were acts of war ... Freedom and democracy are under attack.” Tony Blair poured his own rhetorical fuel onto the fire a few days later: “we know that they would, if they could, go further and use chemical or biological or even nuclear weapons of mass destruction.” This theme recast the destruction wrought by 9/11. According to our rulers, it was not an act of 19 fanatics armed with nothing more than box-

cutters and good luck: it was definitive proof of the fantastic powers, reach and sophistication of the enemy.

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

The government’s poodles in the mainstream media and in the universities swallowed this line so quickly and enthusiastically that they didn’t bother to chew. Hence it became routine to say that “everything had changed.” We (the U.S. in particular and its Western lackeys in general) have entered the “Age of Terror.” Some conservatives dubbed it the “Third World War” – or perhaps the fourth, for those neocons who thought that the Cold War should be included in the list and regretted that it didn’t cost even more blood and treasure. George W. Bush endorsed this view. On 6 May 2005, he referred to the passenger revolt on Flight 93 as “the first counterattack to World War Three.” Another popular phrase was “existential struggle,” which suggested that the very existence of the U.S. was in jeopardy. Irwin Cottler (a renowned human rights busybody and yet another highly educated damn fool of the sort that Canada produces in embarrassing profusion) took this point to a laughable extreme. He often referred to terrorism as “an existential threat to the whole of the human family.”

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

mered these themes. Like the inhabitants of Hitler's Germany, whose rulers relentlessly fed them lies about Jews, in the decade since 11 September 2001 Americans have continuously been fed the falsehood that terrorism poses a grave threat not just to their personal safety, but to civilisation itself. America is no safer or freer, but it is certainly far deeper in debt and its government is much bigger.

Those Who Want War Often Get It

When George W. Bush delivered his State of the Union Address in January 2003, he was completing plans for the invasion of Iraq. Perhaps that's why his tone was as intense as a Tom Clancy novel:

Saddam Hussein aids and protects terrorists, including members of al-Qa'ida. Secretly, and without fingerprints, he could provide one of his hidden weapons to terrorists, or help them develop their own. Before September 11, many in the world believed that Saddam Hussein could be contained. But chemical agents, lethal viruses, and shadowy terrorist networks are not easily contained. Imagine those nineteen hijackers with other weapons and other plans – this time armed by Saddam Hussein. It would take one vial, one canister, one crate slipped into this country to bring a day of horror like none we have ever known ...

This theme – “we” must act now to preclude the slightest chance this occurs in the future, and anybody who doubts it is either a defeatist or a traitor – appeared repeatedly in statements from the White House (and Downing Street and The Lodge) in the weeks and months before the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq. Ron Suskind, the author of *The One Percent Doctrine: Deep Inside America's Pursuit of Its Enemies Since 9/11* (Simon & Schuster, 2006) traces it to Bush's Vice-President, Dick Cheney. According to Suskind, immediately after 11 September 2001 Cheney directed that “if there was even a one percent chance of terrorists getting a weapon of mass destruction – and there has been a small probability of such an occurrence for some time – the United States must now act as if that were a certainty.” Neocons have no shame – or sense of consistency: they stridently reject the precautionary principle as applied to climate change, but they enthusiastically embrace it when it comes to terrorism!

Long after even the dullest blade could see that the “mission” in Iraq had not been “accomplished,” Americans continued to support strongly George W. Bush's “handling” of terrorism. When danger looms, it seems, Americans want a strongman in charge. Republicans obliged them by asserting that untold and growing dangers constantly loomed. They followed this script to the letter – in an even blunter and more frightening form – in 2004 and 2006. In the campaign of 2006, Dick Cheney repeatedly warned of “mass death in the United States.” Yet the terrorist threat wasn't a winner for Republicans in 2006. Perhaps their bungled (to put it mildly) response to Hurricane Katrina cost them support. And the deepening chaos in Iraq – “the central front in the war on terror” – also cast doubt upon their alleged competence. Perhaps most importantly, not all Americans can be frightened indefinitely. After all, if they're in such terrible danger, doesn't their

very vulnerability demonstrate that Republicans have failed to provide “security”? Yet it was hardly just Republicans: the entire Establishment Within the Beltway unanimously and relentlessly asserted that terrorists posed a great danger to the life of each and every American.

Hence the rapid rise of the Terrorism Industry – a protected, featherbedded and molycoddled industry if there ever was one. Almost immediately after 11 September 2001, lobbyists and politicians recognised that a foolproof way to secure legislative and executive approval for virtually any spending proposal was to assert that it was a necessary condition of “national security” (a phrase that should make Americans shudder, but apparently makes them cheer). In [Doublespeak and the War on Terrorism, Cato Briefing Paper No. 98](#), Timothy Lynch cited examples of this “security.” Among the most laughable: \$250,000 for air-conditioned rubbish trucks in Newark, New Jersey, and \$900,000 for the ferries in Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts. Its harbourmaster sheepishly admitted “I don’t know what we’re going to do, but you don’t turn down grant money.”

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have also used terrorism to push their sectional barrows. Greenpeace and other foes of nuclear energy warned that terrorists could attack existing reactors, and that the construction of new ones would increase the risk that fissionable material fell into the hands of terrorists. Not to be upstaged, the Worldwatch Institute campaigned against Big Agriculture on the grounds that terrorists could infiltrate it ([The Bioterror in Your Burger](#), one of its press releases memorably and laughably screeched). The issue didn’t matter: NGOs linked it (no matter how implausibly) to politicians’ and the general public’s fear of terrorism.

In [There is Nothing to Fear but the TSA Itself](#), [The Dollar Vigilante](#) reports:

Despite zero US deaths per year in the US from terrorism since 9/11, the [Transportation Safety Administration] is expanding at a voracious rate. The TSA has been found screening train passengers and Homeland Security chief Janet Napolitano has admitted that body scanners would eventually find their way into US public transportation, trains and boats and is already beta-testing technology that goes even further, by forcing Americans to undergo a behavioral interrogation before they are allowed to enter sports events, rock concerts and shopping malls. They’ve even proposed doing patdowns at high school proms!

In June they spread way beyond airport security. A joint VIPR “security exercise” involving military personnel had Transportation Security Administration workers covering 5,000 miles and three states. The TSA is turning into a literal occupying army for domestic repression in America.

As well, they keep coming up with new threats that they say we all need to be worried about. They never cite any actual source, always proclaiming that “terrorist chatter” has indicated the threat. Who are these terrorists and where are they all chattering? That is top secret.

Now they say that the big threat is terrorists implanting bombs before boarding airplanes! Of course, the TSA states that this will require “enhanced,” more invasive patdowns. They’ve even stated that the bombs could be placed in breast implants! So, get ready ladies, we’re going to have to double and triple check those breasts for any signs of irregularities. And just yesterday the TSA has stated that they will have to do a pat-down of “poofy hair.”

What’s next? Mandatory hair shaving before boarding a flight or train? Why not also just require tattooing of your social insurance number on your arm as well? Better safe than sorry, right?

The failure of American, Australian, British and most other Western governments to put the risk of terrorism into perspective – or even to understand the rudiments of risk and risk management – has been utter, total and complete. George W. Bush (or Tony Blair or John Howard) never confessed that, as serious as terrorism is, it doesn’t pose a significant risk to the individual American. He never once said “calm down.” He never said something like “you’ve got a better chance of being killed by lightning than by a terrorist,” and that the randomly-selected individual is far more likely to die as a result of diabetes and heart disease – or at the hands one of his countrymen in a violent but non-terrorist crime.

Neither did any other politician, Republican or Democrat. In June 2007, New York’s mayor, Michael Bloomberg, came close. “There are a lot of threats to you in the world,” he told *The New York Times*. He mentioned a few, including heart attacks and lightning strikes. “You can’t sit there and worry about everything. Get a life!” The sentiment is noble, but Bloomberg ignored probability by lumping together heart attacks – a significant risk for most people – with the extreme improbability of death by lightning strike and terrorist attack. Ironically, only John McCain (*Why Courage Matters: The Way to a Braver Life*, Ballantine Books, reprint ed., 2008, p. 33) exhorted Americans to heed the relevant probabilities: “get on the damn elevator! Fly on the damn plane! Calculate the odds of being harmed by a terrorist! It’s still about as being swept out to sea by a tidal wave.” Unfortunately, McCain made this statement only in the book. His public pronouncements, before and after, affirm a Big Lie of American politics: “we” are at war against a mighty enemy; the risk they pose is grave and existential; therefore “national security,” at no matter what cost, is non-negotiable.

The Score After a Decade: al-Qa’ida 5, Western Democracies 1

“Terrorism,” writes Brian Michael Jenkins, “is actual or threatened violence calculated to create an atmosphere of fear or alarm, which will in turn cause people to exaggerate the strength of the terrorists and the threat they pose.” Yet terrorists are clearly *not* formidable foes. If they were, they’d use formidable means. It’s precisely their weakness that leads them to the slaughter of innocents – which is one of the very few means available to them. Slaughter *per se* is highly unlikely to inflict a serious – never mind a mortal – blow upon their enemies. But it can and often does generate great fear, particularly when Western governments move heaven and earth in order to fan it; and fear, in turn, can trigger the (over)reactions that,

terrorists hope, will advance their cause. First and foremost among these overreactions are the War on Terror, the invasions of other lands and draconian restrictions of civil liberties in the name of “national security” (a phrase that should make any liberty-loving person’s blood boil).

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

Hence the West’s response to 9/11 was not just utterly wrongheaded: it was breathtakingly and monumentally stupid. It handed victory on a silver platter to Osama bin Laden and al-Qa’ida. George W. Bush was the greatest ally Osama bin Laden could possibly have imagined. Define the attacks as a war (as Bush did) and the rag-tag band of terrorists who committed them become an army – and a boon to al-Qa’ida’s recruitment. Define the war as a cataclysmic fight to the death and nothing less than the Third World War – as neocons repeatedly did – and you declare to the world that al-Qa’ida is so powerful that it could conceivably defeat the United States of America. Insisting that America would “do whatever it takes,” no matter how long it took, did not erase this implication. Quite the contrary: it cemented it.

This is the greatest gift George could possibly have given Osama. In the 1990s, bin Laden grandiosely “declared war” on the U.S., but Bill Clinton wisely ignored (or, more likely, didn’t even notice) him. After he bombed American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and attacked an American ship off the coast of the Arabian Peninsula, Obama’s profile rose somewhat, but he had nowhere near the notoriety he required in order to become the unifying voice of fanatical Muslims who wished to eradicate their corrupt governments and fantasise about a new caliphate. When George declared that Osama was an existential threat to the U.S., he gave Osama exactly the renown he craved. In the 1970s, the German government refused to let the Red Brigades goad it into an overreaction; after 11 September 2001, the U.S. Government delivered overreaction on a massive scale that surely exceeded bin Laden’s and al-Qa’ida’s wildest fantasies. George W. Bush is the only president in American history with degrees from both Harvard and Yale. It’s absolutely no accident that he is, in other words, the most highly miseducated damn fool who’s ever occupied that office.

Conclusion: Our Rulers Are Stupid and Evil

How, then, has al-Qa'ida's strategy fared? How about Bush's and Obama's? Consider this passage from *The Daily Telegraph* (London, 8 July 2011):

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

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

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

Even these figures however only scratch the surface of the suffering, in terms of people injured and maimed, or those who have died from malnutrition or lack of treatment. “When the fighting stops, the indirect dying continues,” Neta Crawford, a co-director of the Brown study, said. Not least, the wars may have created some 7.8 million refugees, roughly equal to the population of Scotland and Wales.

What America achieved by such outlays is also more than questionable. Two brutal regimes, those of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, have been overturned while al-Qa'ida, the terrorist group that carried out 9/11, by all accounts has been largely destroyed – but in neither Iraq nor Afghanistan is democracy exactly flourishing, while the biggest winner from the Iraq war has been America's arch-foe Iran.

Osama bin Laden and his henchmen probably spent the pittance of just \$500,000 on organising the September 2001 attacks, which killed 3,000 people and directly cost the US economy an estimated \$50 billion to \$100 billion. In 2003, President George W Bush proclaimed that the Iraq war would cost \$50 billion to \$60 billion. Governments that go to war invariably underestimate the cost – but rarely on such an epic scale. If the Brown study is correct, the wars that flowed from 9/11 will not only have been the longest in US history. At \$4 trillion and counting, their combined cost is approaching

that of the Second World War, put at some \$4.1 trillion in today's prices by the Congressional Budget Office.

How, has al-Qa'ida's strategy fared during the past decade? How has the U.S. Government's? Consider in this light the five points on pp. 9-10:

1. Al-Qa'ida has successfully provoked the United States and its allies into the invasion of Muslim nations. Preliminary score: al-Qa'ida 2 (one point each for Afghanistan and Iraq), U.S. 0.
2. Al-Qa'ida has successfully incited local resistance to the occupying forces. Preliminary score: al-Qa'ida 4 (one point each for Afghanistan and Iraq), U.S. 0.
3. Al-Qa'ida has successfully expanded these conflicts to neighbouring countries, and engaged the U.S. in long and widespread wars of attrition. Preliminary score: al-Qa'ida 5 (one point for Pakistan), U.S. 0.
4. Al-Qa'eda has morphed into an ideology and set of operating principles that can be loosely franchised in other countries (such as Yemen and Somalia) without requiring direct command and control; and via these franchises incite attacks against the U.S. (and countries allied to it) until they withdraw from the conflict. Preliminary score: al-Qa'ida 5 (no points – yet – for this criterion), U.S. 1 (let's give them the benefit of the doubt so that we avoid a whitewash).
5. Al-Qa'ida has bled the U.S. economy (and those of the nations that run fools errands for Uncle Sam). Will they collapse partly under the strain of too many military engagements in too many places? Preliminary score: al-Qa'ida 5 (no additional points – yet), U.S. 1.

The tenth anniversary of the attacks of 11 September 2001 is a time to reflect, mourn, forgive and ask forgiveness. For the sake of their own sanity, Americans (and Westerners more generally) must forgive the crazed fanatics who planned and launched the attacks on 11 September 2001. Americans and Westerners must also beg forgiveness for the meddling of Western political and military fanatics in Muslim lands, ranging from Iran and Saudi Arabia in the 1940s to virtually the entire Arab world (and its war of terror waged upon innocent civilians) today. At some point, Americans and those who run fools' errands for Uncle Sam must confess the truth: the War on Terror is one of America's biggest diplomatic, economic and military defeats. Civilians and soldiers have died for nothing.

Mark Twain purportedly said: "all you need is ignorance and confidence and the success is sure." George W. Bush and his henchmen possessed superabundant unawareness and self-assurance; with it, they commenced the "War on Terror." Yet after a decade, the U.S. Government and its allies are losing the war. That's obvious to everybody except Uncle Sam and his sock puppets. Barack Obama's slogan for his 2012 re-election should be "No, we can't." Will he end the war, or will its ruinous economic and military consequences end his presidency?

Chris Leithner