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# The Real Threat From Oklahoma City: Tactical and Strategic Responses to Terrorism

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## INTRODUCTION

General William W. Momyer, United States Air Force commander in Vietnam and participant in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, has written that the central lesson of his experience in three wars is that "airpower can win battles, or it can win wars . . . [F]ew distinctions in war are more important."<sup>1</sup> Arguably, the United States had dramatically learned this lesson about airpower by the Gulf War. The same lesson applies to terrorism. Tactical responses can "win battles;" they can help to protect a particular target, thwart a particular bomber, or harden against a particular weapon, but they cannot defeat a strategy of terrorism. Only strategic responses to terrorism can "win wars."

The advent of significant instances of domestic terrorism in the United States, particularly the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York and the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, can prompt a tactical focus on terrorism. The transition from an international terrorism threat to the United States to a domestic-based threat leads to a jurisdictional shift within the US government, with the Justice Department replacing the State Department as lead agency and a number of other organizational and jurisdictional additions, deletions, and shifts in responsibility. It can also lead to a shift from viewing and responding to terrorism as a strategic, national security issue to a focus on it as domestic, federal politics under the tactical categorization of criminal justice policy. It is the position of this article that any shift from a strategic to a tactical approach to terrorism has a limiting effect on counter-terrorism policy and its implementation. Countering terrorism requires complementary strategic and tactical responses, all undertaken from an integrating strategic perspective. These points are applicable to strategies of terrorism everywhere, even though this article specifically addresses the terrorism problem from the perspective of the United States.

This article proceeds from the position that lessons unlearned are not lessons at all. It therefore combines selected, well-established lessons from past experience with terrorism into the contemporary context of terrorism as it affects the United States, adding its own terrorism model and framework for revising the US response policy. The article first presents tactical and strategic views of terrorism, comparing and contrasting the implications of each perspective on counter-terrorism policy and operations, particularly as the United States begins facing domestic terrorism. It then reviews the central lessons learned from over two decades of addressing external, international terrorism as it has affected the United States, suggesting an outline for responding strategically to terrorism.

After reviewing the evolution and current state of US government terrorism policy and organization, it recommends a policy framework for the United States to counter terrorism based on an application of the strategic view.

## **TERRORISM: STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL VIEWS**

In general terms, terrorism is calculated violence applied toward coercive intimidation or provocation.<sup>2</sup> The "calculated violence" component points to a focus on the instrumental act -- the bomb or the gun, the shooter, the victim, the violence. The "coercive intimidation or provocation" points to the ultimate objective -- the creation of fear as leverage toward changing some aspect of government or society. The central point is that terrorism cannot effectively be viewed as one or the other; it is not simply the act, nor is it simply the objective. Both perspectives are essential to fully understand, analyze, and respond to terrorism.

This article deals with political terrorism -- a strategy of violence within a broader political context. This rules out the violent act of the single criminal or deranged individual acting toward personal ends, and it excludes the occasional use of indiscriminate violence as a tactic within a wider revolutionary campaign. Terrorism here is the strategy, the central manifestation of the political violence, and the vehicle designed to reach the political end.<sup>3</sup> The terrorism addressed here is the "systematic political terrorism"<sup>4</sup> that the world has seen since the 1970s.

Today terrorism has taken a new turn, finding victims and targets within the borders of the United States. RAND data shows that US citizens and property were the favored targets of international terrorists every year from 1968 to 1994.<sup>5</sup> US diplomats and missions, business personnel and facilities, and military personnel and bases overseas were the direct objects of the attacks. But few of those attacks occurred within US borders. Today that situation is changing. In the decade of the 1990s, the US has begun to see internationally inspired attacks within its borders, as well as incidents of home-grown terror. But regardless of the location of the act or the origin of the cause or group behind the attack, systematic political terrorism fits into a single mold, and it must be examined as the strategy it is. David Fromkin presents a comprehensive characterization of the strategy of terrorism.

All too little understood, the uniqueness of the strategy lies in this: that it achieves its goal not through its acts but through the response to its acts. In any other such strategy, the violence is the beginning and its consequences are the end of it. For terrorism, however, the consequences of the violence are themselves merely a first step and form a stepping stone toward objectives that are more remote. Whereas military and revolutionary actions aim at a physical result, terrorist actions aim at a psychological result.

But even that psychological result is not the final goal. Terrorism is violence used in order to create fear; but it is aimed at creating fear in order that the fear, in turn, will lead

somebody else -- not the terrorist -- to embark on some quite different program of action that will accomplish whatever it is that the terrorist really desires.<sup>6</sup>

Viewing terrorism as a strategy widens the perspective to address the entire process, including elements behind and preceding the specific act, that act, and the ultimate goals the strategy seeks to fulfill. It addresses the element of fear and the target of that fear. In doing so, it does not neglect the act itself, the elements of which we call the tactical environment, yet it specifically includes the broader political context of the given act, or what we label the strategic environment. A graphic depiction of the entire "process" is at Figure 1.

The tactical environment consists of the direct elements involved in a given act of terrorism: the terrorist, the weapon, the victim, and the act itself. Terrorist actors are difficult to categorize. While different groups seek to recruit specific segments of society, "All that can be said with any degree of confidence is that terror was (and is) a pursuit of young people, and that in most other respects the differences between terrorists are more pronounced than the features they may have in common."<sup>7</sup> Terrorist victims also defy easy categorization. Other than the fact that Americans predominate as targets of international terrorism, and that among Americans diplomats, businessmen, and members of the military services have been most at risk, victims have represented a wide range of people and things: men, women, and children; young and old; famous and ordinary; planes, trains, ships, cars, and buildings.

But terrorist weapons and tactics do fit into predictable patterns, and their use can also be grouped around related acts. Bombs have been and continue to be the favored mode of attack. They account for almost half of all attacks (46 percent), and that percentage has been stable (between 40 and 50 percent) since 1968. Second come attacks on installations (by weapons, arson, and sabotage other than bombing) at 22 percent since 1968. Hijackings are a distant third (12 percent), with assassinations (6 percent), and kidnapping (1 percent) rounding out the top five.<sup>8</sup> Bombings require few people, can be carried out with relatively crude devices, allow the bomber a fair chance to escape prior to detonation, and today can incorporate new and sophisticated explosives, timers, and fuses.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the tactical environment and its elements are relatively straight-forward, are well known and studied, and are important in both responding to an individual act and designing a general response policy. Both investigation and prevention rely heavily on specifics of the tactical environment. Certain groups may prefer particular victims, a particular style of device or type of explosive or weapon, follow a predictable *modus operandi*, or even fit a specific personnel profile. Such characteristics are key to solving a specific criminal incident or seeking to block an identifiable category of attack. But the larger, strategic environment is central to a broader attempt to understand and defeat the terrorist. "[Terrorism's] success seems to be due in large part to a miscomprehension of the strategy by its opponents. They have neglected the more important of the two levels on which terrorism operates."<sup>10</sup>

The strategic environment, the "more important of the two levels," begins with the cause behind the strategy of terrorism. "Causes may be broadly conceptualized as any one of an array of observable economic, political, social, and/or psychological factors."<sup>11</sup> Causes are those long-term (social inequities, political disenfranchisement, economic depressions) or short-term (ethnicity, relative deprivation, government repression) conditions which underlie the resort to a strategy of terror.<sup>12</sup> There are at least three broad categories: redress of grievance, overthrow and replacement of the existing government/system, and liberation from "foreign" masters.<sup>13</sup> Whatever the specific set of factors behind the strategy, the cause serves as the driving force for recruitment, support, and planning -- all of which are sub-elements of organization.

Broadly defined, organization includes a range of subordinate elements essential to carrying out the strategy such as planning, surveillance (intelligence), transportation, papers and identification, arms, money (finance), publicity and propaganda, and command and control as functions of organization.<sup>14</sup> Or "organization provides the formalized structure utilized for the planning, coordination, and application of extranormal forms of political violence."<sup>15</sup> It includes the terrorist political and "military" infrastructures that form the organizational strengths and weaknesses of the strategic and tactical sides of the movement.<sup>16</sup> Taken as a whole, organization is a critical part of the strategy, and it provides a central focus for defeating that strategy.

The key linkage to the tactical environment, the linchpin that activates the strategy into an act of terrorism, is motivation. It is here that an individual or group chooses to carry out specific acts of violence in support of the strategy. Motivation translates cause into action, and it applies the organization at the tactical level, indicating the short-term level of popular support, recruitment, and operational capabilities. Just as causes are varied and organizations range from simple to complex, motivation is difficult to generalize. "Any explanation that attempts to account for all its many manifestations is bound to be either exceedingly vague or altogether wrong."<sup>17</sup> Context is the answer here, and it is the principal contribution of the strategic perspective. The broad context, the strategic environment, holds the answers to most questions about who, how, and why terrorism exists and operates at a given place and time.

The linchpin on the output side of the act is fear -- the psychological effect and the critical dynamic of the terror. It too must be analyzed within the strategic context of terrorism. Strategic terrorism is, at base, an extreme form of psychological warfare, and the broader fear engendered by the act lends its ultimate credibility. The means are justified by the ends, and the end is that the target reacts due to fear.<sup>18</sup>

That fear is designed to evoke a response from the ultimate target of the act, the government or society. The intention may be that the government change its external policy, changing its support to or from a nation or government. Or it may be to discredit the government, graphically demonstrating that it cannot control its territory or protect its citizens -- that it cannot govern. It might be to drive a wedge between the government and its people. Or it could be simply to publicize and recruit to a cause. In all of these cases, and more, the act and its victim(s) will be directly or symbolically linked to the

target, and the fear is intended to transfer the effect from the act to the behavior of that target.

Finally, the terror is intended to cause that target to react in a specific way. This is the end goal, the overall objective of the strategy. Government or society must change, and the strategy points directly, as a continuum from its root cause, toward affecting that change. Government or social reaction -- whether over-reaction, under-reaction, or pointed reaction -- is the goal at the output end of the process, and the strategy succeeds or fails only as a function of the direction and degree of the reaction it achieves. Those reactions and the objectives they seek will generally fall under one of the following: recognition, intimidation, coercion or provocation.<sup>19</sup>

### **Recognition**

Recognition is important for all terrorist groups. They seek to publicize and legitimize their cause, and a terrorist incident guarantees immediate news coverage. A terrorist incident will draw attention to a particular issue and perhaps galvanize the general public to support the organization's cause. Incident timing and the specific victim/nature of the act is often tailored to "get the message across." For the terrorist, the media is a critical tool for getting his message out -- a violent act guarantees media coverage. Media is a business, and news organs will give their attention to stories that attract viewers or readers. As one observer commented, "nothing is so newsworthy as violence."<sup>20</sup> There is also a concern that if they do not give coverage to incidents, terrorism will escalate in violence until the media finally gives in. Ultimately, even the threat of violence can lead to publicity for the terrorist cause.

Terrorists also require funds and recruits, guns and materials, money and logistics. Often they seek recognition directly in support of building and sustaining their infrastructure. Robbing banks or armories, seeking publicity for recruitment as well as to further their political cause, terrorists often undertake fairly "normal" criminal acts to secure this essential support. This can be a point of vulnerability for the group, and criminal patterns should be monitored to track terrorist cycles of infrastructure building.

### **Intimidation**

When organizations find they lack public support, they may turn to terrorist activities as a means to frighten society to act in a specific way. This is the "terror" in terrorism. The target in this case is the population as a whole, with their fear and anxiety designed to force the government or the economic system to make the changes proposed by the terrorists. Terrorists might choose as victims only those segments of the population which are linked to their cause. For instance, left-wing groups might initiate a bombing or assassination campaign against financial or industrial leaders, and "ecoterrorists" often focus their attacks on developers and the timber industry.

### **Coercion**

A group may try to coerce the government into taking certain actions in an attempt to bring about societal changes. Terrorist incidents with coercion as the objective are quickly followed by specific demands and threats of further violence. Kidnappings and hijackings are popular tactics here because they provide the terrorists with bargaining chips and hold the possibility of being resolved without permanent injury to the victims. Such activities are often conducted in response to government actions -- "revenge" by a terrorist group is primarily a means of encouraging the government not to repeat an action.

Civilian casualties are an important consideration of coercion. Terrorists realize that their demands may be lost in the confusion that would follow an incident like the destruction of Pan Am Flight 103 or the bombing of the World Trade Center. They must consider that civilian casualties may anger the public and lead to demands for government retaliation. Public officials would be less likely to negotiate with a group that committed such an act. The power, then, lies more in the threat of violence than in violence itself. For this reason, events such as kidnappings and hijackings, small-scale actions such as assassinations, and acts of violence which appear random but which cause few, if any, injuries, are more likely to be perpetrated by groups that see coercion of the government as their goal.

### **Provocation**

Another means of increasing support for a cause is to decrease support for the government. Terrorists may commit acts designed to provoke the government into a response that will be resented by members of the public. Warrantless searches, roadblocks, repressive measures against civilians -- all of these can reduce the trust people have in their government, leading to acceptance of the terrorist perspective as the more attractive alternative. Provocation can best be accomplished by attacking the government directly and inflicting significant damage/casualties on it. The hope is that there will be some within government who will seek revenge against the terrorists, and their response may have an impact on innocent, law-abiding civilians. Fromkin wrote "Brutality is an induced governmental response . . . that has enabled terrorist strategies to succeed in many situations . . . ." <sup>21</sup>

Governments need to recognize the objective(s) behind the action because the entire cause-to-objective chain might then be evident, allowing the response to focus directly at the terrorist strategy. They also need to understand the nature of the groups most likely to constitute the domestic threat within the United States.

### **UNITED STATES DOMESTIC TERRORISM**

Today the United States faces a rising threat of international terrorism perpetrated on its soil, as well as a growing threat from indigenous US groups. The 1990s provided two powerful boosts to international terrorism directed against the United States. First, the end of the Cold War lifted restraints from political movements and groups while also spurring regional and national instability in many areas. As the one remaining



superpower and "leader" of the movement toward a new world order, the United States found itself blamed for a host of international disorders and perceived slights. At the same time, the Gulf War demonstrated the futility of attempting conventional warfare against that "repressive" United States. The combination of the two factors caused some to turn to terrorism in their efforts to achieve political ends that they saw the United States as blocking. Particularly in an era of open transnational communications and transportation, the United States must be fully cognizant of the threat from international terrorism. It must also prepare to face its own terrorism at home.

The American tradition of political violence has been somewhat limited compared to much of the Western world. American society is violent in many ways, but violence for political ends has been relatively muted. Only the violent labor incidents of the late 1800s and early 1900s stand out as recurring examples of political violence. Beyond labor violence, the United States has long seen the use of violent intimidation by the Ku Klux Klan to further its racist and right-wing social ends, and groups on the left such as the Symbionese Liberation Army and the Weathermen have also employed terror tactics. However, these groups have never progressed beyond the far fringes of mainstream American society. The lack of a domestic tradition of terrorism perhaps led many to a false belief that the United States would not face any significant domestic terrorist threat. This is not the case in the 1990s.

### **Domestic Left-Wing Terrorism**

Left-wing groups have a distinctive political and economic, redistributive focus. They tend to organize in urban areas, often forming a cause around the urban underclasses, but they often draw their members from the middle and upper classes. They favor a classical cellular structure, and they tend to target facilities with clear symbolic attachments to the government (visible centers of governmental authority) or symbols of capitalism such as banks or large corporate headquarters.<sup>22</sup> Although a factor in the 1960s and 1970s, some predict only a minor future threat from the left as a result of the collapse of European and Soviet communism.<sup>23</sup>

### **Domestic Right-Wing Terrorism**

Right-wing groups temper their politics with social agendas. Many of these groups trace their origins and philosophy to the Christian Identity Movement. A few could be classed as religious extremists, willing to take more risks and give up their lives in support of a "righteous" cause. As the new millenium approaches, there are many who see the signs of the return of Christ and the conclusion of the war with Satan. The time is ripe for action, and often that action may be directed against society at large. Millenarian movements are inherently monistic in their view of the future (God will rule) but dualistic in their view of the present (God and Satan are engaged in total war). Since complex societies tend to be pluralistic in nature, as is the United States, the door to conflict and violence continues to open wider as the end of the millenium looms closer.<sup>24</sup>



For those not quite so extreme, their beliefs still provide justification in their minds for a wide range of activities that violate the law. Their politics are strongly anti-Communist, their recruitment base is among lower socio-economic class whites, and they are normally based in rural areas. Rather than the cellular structure of the left, the right-wing groups tend to be part of larger, even national, networks. Since this can compromise security, they often have a secure camp or compound, isolated in a rural area, to which they can fall back for protection.<sup>25</sup> Their targets include opposing racial or religious groups (blacks and Jews bear the brunt of these attacks) as well as federal law enforcement agencies and local federal officials who are seen as oppressing them.<sup>26</sup> Observers predict an increase in right-wing activity due to such issues as affirmative action, immigration, and a perception of minorities as a burden on society.<sup>27</sup> The true validity of their issues is not important; the fact that they have become politicized around these issues is the spur to action.

### **Domestic Single-Issue Terrorism**

As the name implies, these organizations focus on one issue that is important to them. Their political and economic views span the spectrum from left to right, depending on their issue of choice. Groups such as animal rights groups, anti-tax groups, and skinheads fall into this category. They may follow either the left-wing or the right-wing model, depending on their issue of choice, but their targets fall into a fairly narrow range. Certain extreme anti-abortion groups have also been energized to use lethal force within this decade, and the potential for such violence continues. These groups may well be prone to further violence as their "war" continues.<sup>28</sup>

The United States is not only the tactical site of such terrorism, but it is also part of the strategic purpose -- the United States government is the target of this terrorism. So the strategic perspective, which incorporates both the tactical environment of the act and its broader political, strategic context, provides a full picture of terrorism from its root cause to its ultimate effect. The perspective also points out the critical linking mechanisms, motivation and fear, which connect the strategic cause and organization to the act and through that act to its target and objective. These linchpins are critical to the success of the strategy, and they present attractive targets for a strategy of response. A cause creates general support, which must be channeled and operationalized through effective organization to motivate individuals to take up arms against a victim in an attack of terror. On the output side, that act is designed to generate fear so that the fear will affect a specific target, a government and/or society, to generate a change in behavior that supports the objective for which the strategy of terror was adopted. All of these elements must be analyzed and understood to design an effective response, and the international experience with political terrorism across the past 25-30 years provides guidance for the United States as it enters the twenty-first century.

### **INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM: LESSONS LEARNED**

While the advent of terrorist incidents on United States' territory is relatively new, the US and the international community have extensive experience in dealing with terrorism.

That experience has presented some clear indicators, cautions, and lessons to be applied in responding to the current occurrence of domestic terrorism. And the core lessons that experience imparts point to the necessity to view and respond to terror within its strategic context.

Experience teaches that focusing on the tactical environment alone cannot defeat terrorism. But neither can a focus solely on the root causes of disaffection. Terrorism often continues even after it is clear that it cannot succeed. Activism takes precedence over ideology, and the continuation of the strategy becomes paramount even without any chance for success. So it is futile to attempt to remove the root causes as a singular response strategy, just as it is to ignore those root causes.<sup>29</sup> Terrorism requires an integrated response strategy. The general structure of that response should incorporate the micro, or tactical, level -- anti-terrorism elements based on tactical information to prevent or limit attacks, as well as counter-terrorism elements based on responding to specific acts. It must also incorporate macro, or strategic, level responses -- laws and legislation to target causes and motivation, as well as forces and intelligence aimed at the terrorist organization.<sup>30</sup> Above all, it must attempt to mitigate the fear, reinforce the target, and avoid the reaction that the terrorist seeks. "Terrorism wins only if you respond to it in the way that the terrorists want you to; . . . its fate is in your hands and not in theirs."<sup>31</sup>

The integrated response should seek to isolate the terrorist via a political, strategic approach so that a tactical, criminal justice response can deliver the knockout punch. The terrorist who is viewed as extremist, whose objectives and methods are widely discredited within the target society, who has no real support base upon which to expand, can be effectively trivialized as a political threat and treated solely as a criminal justice matter.<sup>32</sup> The key is to affect that isolation. Avoid any statement or public action that will legitimize the cause or magnify the effect of the terrorism.<sup>33</sup> Refuse to do what the terrorist wants you to do, and you will have already begun that process of isolation.

The tactical response focuses on the modus operandi -- the specific weapons, tactics, training, operations, and personnel involved in the act -- and remains at the center of preventative and criminal justice elements of the overall response. The integrated response strategy, however, builds beyond the tactical environment to incorporate a strategic focus on the linking mechanisms -- motivation and fear.<sup>34</sup> These linking mechanisms are the keys to isolating the act within its broader context, limiting the effectiveness of the terror. This is particularly true when examining and responding to terrorism at home. Wilkinson states it clearly:

And the terrorists judge their own "success" or "failure" primarily in terms of political, psychological and propaganda impact rather than purely by the traditional military criteria of deaths and damage caused. . . . Whereas it may well be possible to engage in trend analysis and prediction over the range of international and transnational terrorism, internal terrorist dangers can only be properly and thoroughly assessed in relation to the unique context of the campaign concerned.<sup>35</sup>

Examination of the strategic, political context -- the nature of the movement, its resources and aims, the degree and sources of support, the reception and influence of its message -- indicates the relative strengths and weaknesses of the campaign and of its target government/society. That context highlights the critical points that the terrorism is targeting, and those centers of gravity which can isolate, even trivialize, the terrorists and their campaign. Once they are isolated, a continuing emphasis on the criminality of their acts can be effective, and a criminal justice response can then eliminate their leadership and infrastructure. A public emphasis on the criminality of the act serves to avoid glorifying (and thereby magnifying) the terrorism while also establishing a foundation for the ultimate criminal justice campaign once isolation is achieved.

The United States has some particular vulnerabilities, and the strategic perspective can also help with them. The open, activist press makes it difficult to block terrorists from gaining the publicity they seek. Terrorism is theater, and the American press guarantees a stage. The response, therefore, should ensure that the government mounts an interactive press campaign in conjunction with its other actions. Trying to "lock out" the press can only fuel press speculation, which could ultimately harm the government effort. The strategic response, then, should include a proactive media relations and information effort to facilitate a non-detrimental press role.

Similarly, the open US society yields ready access to technologies and other resources, as well as to alienated or angry anti-government constituencies. America's relatively open borders also allow the import of terrorist actors, equipment, and ideas.<sup>36</sup> The strategic response must recognize that our open society is actually a strength against terrorism -- the central objective of the response must be to preserve the rule of law and the force of democracy.<sup>37</sup> The terrorist may well be seeking government overreaction and the imposition of repressive measures against target segments of society. Therefore, government should refuse to do what they want it to do.

A central operational lesson from international experience fighting terrorism is that the response strategy must be founded in clear objectives, well understood at all levels and among all segments of the response effort, so that the integrated efforts all head in the same direction. A fragmented, disjointed response cannot enjoy a maximum impact on terrorism.<sup>38</sup> Another lesson is that the policy must be built upon a consistent hard line -- no concessions and no political negotiations at any level. The United States is still trying to overcome the damage done by relaxing that standard in Lebanon in the 1980s, and the integrated domestic response must not deviate from the hard line. A "soft line" destroys the long-term deterrent effect of counter-terrorism policy, and serves as an invitation to further terrorism.<sup>39</sup> Clear objectives and a hard-line approach support both the strategic focus on attacking the linking mechanisms of the terrorism process and the integration of tactical and strategic responses under that umbrella effort.

Another lesson from the fight against international terrorism is that while protective measures are important, they cannot defeat terrorism by themselves. Protective hardening and increased border screening, for example, can help to limit certain attacks, but such prophylactic efforts are only fully effective as part of a broader, strategic

response effort.<sup>40</sup> What is essential at both the strategic and tactical levels is intelligence -- governments must "know your enemy" in order to defeat him. This intelligence effort must incorporate strategic as well as tactical indicators. Governments need to fully understand the strategy behind the acts of terrorism in order to defeat that strategy.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, perhaps the most central lesson from fighting international terrorism is that all agencies, levels, and approaches of the response must be coordinated into a single integrated response. Turf battles and bureaucratic differences must be overcome, one agency's tactical strength must be complemented by another's strategic expertise, and the whole "orchestra" must be following the same sheet of music to gain success. Responding effectively to terrorism requires flexibility, coordination, and interoperability (in training, equipment, organization, and, above all, communication). The strategic response also needs a broad consensus of support and cooperation from diverse sectors of the government and society. And the response must be dynamic, further heightening the requirement for coordination and communication. It must be built upon both a framework and a process of coordination. Forming an interagency group is not enough; a true coordinative process must be built, exercised, and employed for success.<sup>42</sup>

### **US Policy and Structure for Responding to International Terrorism**

The United States built and adapted a terrorism response structure across the years to deal with international terrorism. This effort was far from integrated -- it was and is characterized by incrementalism and fragmentation, which are primary characteristics of US public policy. Now, as it enters into the intermestic (combined international and domestic policy) and domestic policy arenas, federalism is further fragmenting the effort.

The US government first addressed international terrorism as a result of the Munich Olympic attack in 1972. President Nixon formed a Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism with representation from 10 agencies, later adding a working group with 11 additional agencies. This structure proved unwieldy, so an Executive Committee was formed with representation from only those 11 agencies actually having jurisdiction over terrorism responses. By several accounts, this series of bodies was found wanting because of size, bureaucratic politics, and lack of focus.<sup>43</sup> However, this structure is typical of US responses to national security issues, and it remains the basic foundation behind all later policy efforts through to today.

The Carter Administration retained the basic interagency structure under the umbrella of the National Security Council (NSC) interagency working groups. However, Carter assigned primary responsibility for countering terrorism to the Special Coordination Committee of the NSC, the crisis management side, giving US policy a decidedly operational center. Even so, the working group grew, with 30 organizations ultimately represented in the process, and the effectiveness of both the process and its products was degraded.<sup>44</sup>

President Reagan shifted primary responsibility back to the policy side of the NSC process, assigning the terrorism portfolio to the Senior Interdepartmental Group for

Foreign Policy and creating four functional working groups, but retained the operational policy focus in practice.<sup>45</sup> What Reagan did add was a specific state focus, defining much of the international terrorism problem in terms of state sponsorship, and an aggressive posture toward responding -- through diplomatic, economic, and military means. By 1986 Vice President Bush completed a comprehensive policy review, codifying the Reagan changes into formal policy but not making any substantive changes to policy or structure.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, even though faced with two major incidents of terrorism on US soil, the Clinton Administration has made only marginal adjustments to US counter-terrorism strategy and structure. The Clinton policy emphasizes international cooperation toward economic and political isolation of proponents of terrorism (retaining the Reagan emphasis on state sponsorship and international terrorism). On the domestic side, Clinton has gained increased resources for counter-terrorism, with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI, the lead agency for domestic terrorism) the main recipient of this increased funding.<sup>47</sup> The US military has also been given a slightly expanded domestic charter to deal with the weapons of mass destruction threat, but it is still strictly delimited from most domestic operations.

Thus, the United States policy response to terrorism has developed incrementally across the years, retaining its fragmented, multi-agency working group structure under the umbrella of the National Security Council interagency framework. It retains an international terrorism/state sponsorship focus, and an incident response, lead agency character with international and domestic divisions at the operational level. This structure has been judged to be overly bureaucratic and "not coherent;"<sup>48</sup> "massive," "cumbersome," and lacking basic cooperation;<sup>49</sup> and "outmoded and unsustainable"<sup>50</sup> by various observers.

As this international terrorism response structure has developed with horizontally fragmented national security and operational agencies, the addition of domestic, law-enforcement agencies promises to add a significant degree of vertical fragmentation. The federal structure of the United States creates overlapping legal and operational jurisdictions between national, state, and local governments, with no effective mechanism to ensure cooperation in most policy arenas. The US policy framework is not prepared for this additional fragmentation, and the lessons of the incremental, fragmented inefficiencies coming forward from the international terrorism experience seem to have been lost as the United States turns to domestic terrorism. Simply adding more agencies and expanding the scope of an already cumbersome apparatus is not the best approach. A tailored, focused, strategic response is the much superior choice.

## **RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC TERRORISM: A STRATEGIC APPROACH**

The targeted, integrated response advocated in this article has three essential elements. First, it must be **proactive** if it is to deter, defend, and respond so as to defeat a strategy of terrorism. To be proactive it must be founded on clear, consistent objectives formulated with an understanding of and a determination to defeat terrorist objectives.

Among these clear objectives must be to preserve democracy and the rule of law, and to respond to terrorism with the full consideration of a balance between civil liberties and security within our society. Legitimacy of government must be maintained. As one observer puts it,

the notion that a democratic status must necessarily abandon its defining principles in order to defeat terrorism is incorrect. An ability to deal with terrorism in a way that is widely held to be in conformity with established political and judicial principles will, in actuality, strengthen the commitment to uphold democratic institutions and, thus, further isolate and weaken those who seek to destroy them.<sup>51</sup>

Another clear objective must be to refuse to overstate, and thus glorify, terrorism and its threat. A corollary here is that the response must include a clear and deliberate media strategy. Government officials must deal with the media, neither tipping the hand of their response nor contributing to the desired effect of the terrorism. Terrorism is theater and the US press is capable, present, and in competition to "outdo" all rivals. However, an inclusive strategy that acknowledges and proactively deals with the media is necessary to limit the marquee effect the terrorist seeks.

Second, it must be **comprehensive**; it must respond strategically to the terrorist strategy. "There are not enough policemen to deal with an enemy likely to strike at any time against any target."<sup>52</sup> The response must proceed from a strategic perspective, incorporating the tactical act only as a part of a larger strategic environment. Within that strategic environment, a successful response must attack the linkages, terrorist motivations and societal fear, to isolate the terrorist from the target society. Once isolated, even though the terrorist can still attack selected targets, the strategy of terrorism cannot hope to succeed, and tactical responses to the tactical acts can then deliver the "knockout" punch to terror. A "hard line," no-concessions policy incorporating a clear and consistent emphasis on the criminality of the act will help achieve that isolation, and is a necessary element of the response. This also helps to avoid glorifying the act and limits any temptation to see terrorists as martyrs to some grander cause.

Finally, it must be **integrated**, cohesive, if it is to succeed in defeating terrorism. This must include integration of the political and criminal dimensions of the response, its international and domestic components and structures, and its counter-terrorism and anti-terrorism efforts. The cohesion must incorporate intelligence, operations, and the suggested informational/media strategy. This is perhaps the hardest part of the response to accomplish since it involves multiple agencies, cultures, and turf battles.

Figure 3 depicts the reality of the current fragmented United States response structure. These multiple agencies and tracks must be brought into coordination, and that effort can only come from the top. We do not advocate the formal creation of a "terrorism czar" around which to centralize organization. That would create significant bureaucratic hurdles while also overstating the gravity of the threat from domestic terrorism. We advocate lower-key coordination based on closer cooperation across the federal executive agencies and active discussion between federal and state officials directed by the cabinet and gubernatorial levels. Our model would have the Attorney General added as a



statutory advisor to the NSC, a move already under discussion to deal with intermestic organized crime, drugs, and immigration.<sup>53</sup> The NSC system, through its interdepartmental working groups, would remain the focal point for coordinating the response structure. The reorganized, tailored terrorism working group(s) would provide the structure and the process to allow bridging the international-domestic terrorism response gap while also serving as the departure point for an expanded coordinative effort. Intramural cultural differences and turf conflicts such as that reported even within the FBI over jurisdiction and information sharing on three Georgia bombing incidents only further the terrorist effort by delaying and limiting the government response.<sup>54</sup>

The working group must also reach out to the state and local structures responding to terrorism. This effort would be furthered by the creation of an integrated terrorism response training program under FBI auspices but incorporating the range of federal, state, and local response agencies, to standardize response skills, terminology, and organization, while also providing a basis for intergovernmental interoperability. As the US military has learned, often painfully, through its experiences in joint service and multinational coalition efforts, a common doctrine, training, equipment, and structure can go a long way toward easing the inevitable strains of interoperation. Australia has created such a national training program, and today each subnational counter-terror organization shares a common language and structure, greatly enhancing coordination efforts.<sup>55</sup> Canada has also increased training and coordination between the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who have the primary operational counter-terrorism role, and major local police forces.<sup>56</sup> Within the United States, local initiatives such as the Central Texas Counterterrorism Working Group can further interoperability and coordination as well.<sup>57</sup> But the US national scope is much more complex than these models, largely due to the nature of American federalism and laws that strictly delimit military and national security organizations from active domestic roles. The coordination effort must begin now and build continuously to enable an integrated terrorism response any time in the near-term future.

An intermestic interagency framework, a common training foundation, and the establishment of an interactive network of federal, state, and local officials charged with countering domestic terrorism can help win the fight. Knowing who to contact, what questions to ask, and what coordination and assistance to expect is essential to an effective and efficient integration of information and action to isolate and defeat terrorism. And such strategic integration is needed to employ a comprehensive, proactive strategy for victory.

A final point must be made: how does one measure the success of such a proactive, comprehensive, and integrated strategic response? What criteria can be employed to measure success? There are some well-established criteria for measuring counter-terror effectiveness in quantitative terms. These include incident rates, casualty counts, terrorists captured without replacement, and terrorists "neutralized" without replacement. But this list is incomplete, and many aspects of countering terrorism do not lend themselves to easy accessibility or quantification.<sup>58</sup> The best criteria are the objectives of the policy as it is developed -- to what degree is the policy achieving its specific



objectives? But those "strategic" criteria will be very difficult to measure, leaving the analyst little alternative but to fall back to incident rates and other more easily quantifiable "tactical" measures. But the policy analyst should not lose sight of the "strategic" criteria, however difficult they are to quantify, because those policy objectives, those strategic goals of the strategic approach, are the real measures of the effectiveness of the response. Strategic responses "win wars," and this is a war that must be won.

## CONCLUSIONS

The world, and the United States government, has endured three decades of modern political terrorism, calculated violence applied toward coercive intimidation or provocation. Terrorist violence is applied for its psychological effects; to employ fear to ultimately force a government to react in some manner designed to further the terrorists' ends. Today's political terrorism has found its way onto US soil, but the international experience can help defeat it before it finds deeper roots here. Experience stresses that terrorism be viewed as a process, one linking the terrorist cause and organization via motivation to the violent action, and linking that action via societal fear to its real target, the government, in order to achieve its desired political objective through government action or inaction. The process perspective also indicates the utility and necessity of a strategic response -- one targeted not just at the bomber, bomb, and victim, but at the cause-to-victim-to-objective chain. A strategy of terrorism demands a strategic response, a strategy that must be proactive, comprehensive, and integrated to win.

By itself, as has been said, terror can accomplish nothing in terms of political goals; it can only aim at obtaining a response that will achieve those goals for it.

. . . The important point is that the choice is yours. That is the ultimate weakness of terrorism as a strategy. It means that, though terrorism cannot always be prevented, it can always be defeated. You can always refuse to do what they want you to do.<sup>59</sup>

## Endnotes

1. William W. Momyer, *Air Power in Three Wars* (Washington DC: Office of Air Force History, 1985 reprint), p. 339.
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3. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, p. 5-7; and Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, p. 51.
4. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, p. 7.

5. Bruce Hoffman, *Responding to Terrorism Across the Technological Spectrum* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, 15 July 1994), p. 20.
6. David Fromkin, "The Strategy of Terrorism," *Foreign Affairs*, 53 (July 1975), pp. 692-93.
7. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, p. 120.
8. *The RAND Chronology of International Terrorism*, reported in Hoffman, *Responding to Terrorism Across the Technological Spectrum*, pp. 2-4.
9. Hoffman, *Responding to Terrorism Across the Technological Spectrum*, pp. 3-5, 15-18.
10. Fromkin, "The Strategy of Terrorism," p. 696.
11. Richard Shultz, "Conceptualizing Political Terrorism," in Charles W. Kegley, Jr., ed., *International Terrorism: Characteristics, Causes, Controls* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), p. 48.
12. Shultz, "Conceptualizing Political Terrorism," p. 48.
13. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, p. 79.
14. Ibid., pp. 84-96.
15. Shultz, "Conceptualizing Political Terrorism," p. 49.
16. G. Davidson Smith, *Combating Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 15-20.
17. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, p. 133.
18. Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, pp. 55-56.
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21. Fromkin, "The Strategy of Terrorism," p. 687.

22. Brent L. Smith, *Terrorism in America: Pipe Bombs and Pipe Dreams* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), pp. 41-45.
23. Smith, *Terrorism in America*, p. 199.
24. Thomas Flanagan, "The Politics of the Millenium," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, (Autumn 1995), p. 164.
25. Smith, *Terrorism in America*, pp. 36-42.
26. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Terrorist Research and Analytical Division, *Terrorism in the United States* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1994), p. 11.
27. Smith, *Terrorism in America*, p. 199.
28. Jeffrey Kaplan, "Absolute Rescue: Absolutism, Defensive Action and the Resort to Force," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 7, no. 3 (Autumn 1995), pp. 140-50.
29. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, p. 220.
30. Christopher Hewitt, *The Effectiveness of Anti-terrorist Policies* (New York: University Press of America, 1984), p. xiv, suggests the micro-policy, macro-policy template.
31. Fromkin, "The Strategy of Terrorism," p. 697.
32. William B. Quandt, "The Multi-Dimensional Challenge of Terrorism: Misperceptions and Policy Dilemmas," in Kegley, *International Terrorism*, pp. 75, 79-80.
33. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, p. 224.
34. Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, p. 54, specifies that the "basic elements" are the aims (motivation), *modus operandi*, and the target audience (via fear). He goes on (p. 60) to designate publicity for the cause and mobilization of support within the target population as immediate goals of the action.
35. Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, p. 82.
36. Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, pp. 103-05.
37. Allan J. Behm and Michael J. Palmer, "Coordinating Counterterrorism: A Strategic Approach to a Changing Threat," *Terrorism* 14 (July-September 1991), p. 177.
38. Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, p. 123.

39. Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, p. 132; and Behm and Palmer, "Coordinating Counterterrorism," p. 176.
40. Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, p. 136; and Behm and Palmer, "Coordinating Counterterrorism," pp. 182-83.
41. Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, p. 137; and Behm and Palmer, "Coordinating Counterterrorism," p. 182.
42. Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, pp. 141-55; and Behm and Palmer, "Coordinating Counterterrorism," pp. 188-90.
43. Marc A. Celmer, *Terrorism, U.S. Strategy, and Reagan Policies* (New York: Greenwood, 1987), pp. 17-19.
44. Celmer, *Terrorism, U.S. Strategy, and Reagan Policies*, pp. 19-23; and J. Brent Wilson, "The United States' Response to International Terrorism," in David A. Charters, ed., *The Deadly Sin of Terrorism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994), p. 177.
45. Celmer, *Terrorism, U.S. Strategy, and Reagan Policies*, pp. 23-24; and Wilson, "The United States' Response to International Terrorism," pp. 177-82.
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49. Wilson, "The United States' Response to International Terrorism," p. 202.
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53. National Defense Panel, *Transforming Defense: National Security in the 21st Century* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, December 1997), pp. 66-67 calls for a reorganized US national security structure including adding the Attorney General (and the Secretary of the Treasury) to the NSC.

54. Elaine Shannon, "The Signature of a Single Bomber?", *Time*, 17 March 1997, p. 14.
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56. G. Davidson Smith, "Canada's Counter-Terrorism Experience," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 5, no. 1 (Spring 1993), pp. 100-03. This article provides a comprehensive discussion of Canada's overall response to terrorism.
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