

Analysis of the U.S. Strategy for Combating Terrorism and Recommendations for Improvement

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Abstract

Before the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the United States, the prevailing perception of the American population was that acts of terrorism were something that occurred in other parts of the world. Amid the immediate groundswell of concern that followed, new antiterrorism laws were passed, investigative commissions were established, and an unparalleled level of government monetary and human resources were committed, all in the name of fighting a new war against terrorism. However, now more than fifteen years after terrorists toppled the twin towers of the World Trade Center and inflicted significant damage to the Pentagon, there is no basis to expect that American foreign policies and supporting counterterrorism strategies will preclude other significant acts of terrorism against the United States in the foreseeable future. When this consideration is combined with the fact that violent terrorist acts have been a worldwide concern for centuries, terrorism can best be viewed as a challenge to be managed, rather than one that can be defeated. Accordingly, this research effort is designed to review the counterterrorism strategy of the United States since the late twentieth century and to provide recommendations for improvement in managing the American fight against terrorism by: evaluating the development of counterterrorism strategies as a component of foreign policy; examining the information gathering and analysis processes by the intelligence community; assessing the applicability of terrorism as a crime punishable through the criminal justice system; exploring the manner that presidential administrations since the late twentieth century have addressed the threat of terrorism; and analyzing how the government response to past terrorist acts influences current decision-making processes.

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The concept of terrorism originated in the late eighteenth century during a period when individuals opposed to the French revolution were punished, typically by a gruesome death. More than two centuries later, defining the concept terrorism is seemingly an elusive task in consideration that there are more than two-hundred definitions in use throughout the world. However, common to all definitions is the inclusion of violence or the threat of violence for the purpose of intimidation, coercion, or propaganda. As such, despite differing objectives associated with acts of terrorism at both the international and domestic level, leaders of terrorist organizations are acutely aware that support for their ideological goals can often be achieved by inciting fear in a targeted population as well as gaining media attention for publicizing the intent of their actions. For this reason, the government's ability to develop a counterterrorism strategy is inherently difficult in consideration of political processes that are more often than not influenced by the media, special interest groups, and public opinion. Additionally, acts of terrorism can often place government leaders in a position where they are forced to respond in a manner where their actions, inactions, and public statements may only serve to further the terrorist's objectives as well as having the unintended consequence of prompting additional acts of terrorism. Therefore, it is imperative that a divergent counterterrorism strategy be established that not only identifies the tactics employed for deterring and responding to future terrorist threats, but also incorporates considerations for the civilian population, government bureaucracy, international community, and other uninvolved terrorist organizations. Accordingly, this research study consists of the following question: *In consideration of the counterterrorism strategy of the United States since the late twentieth century, what recommendations for improvement can be made for managing the threat of terrorism?*

Literature Review

The unambiguous goal of terrorist organizations is to obtain support for their political, religious, or ideological objectives through the threat or actual use of violence (Garrison, 2004). Conversely, the goal of the American government is to thwart terrorism through strategies that involve a combination of direct action against terrorist organizations, and assuming a defensive posture intended to decrease the likelihood of a successful terrorist attack (Drakos & Kutan, 2003). However, while the counterterrorism tactics employed by United States have focused on containing the activities of terrorist organizations, there has been a historical absence of a strategy intended to address the underlying political, religious, and social grievances that are the heart of terrorist violence (Sandler, 2003; Gage, 2011).

Although violent extremism had been a part American society since the earliest days of the republic, it was a marked increase in politically motivated violence during the early 1970s that would prompt the United States government to consider the concept of terrorism as a distinct mode of conflict akin to urban guerrilla warfare (Donohue, 2001; Kerber, 1971). During the same period Arab terrorists had also begun an unprecedented series of kidnappings, aircraft hijackings, bombings, and shootings that would culminate in the hostage-taking and subsequent deaths of Israeli athletes during the 1972 Munich Olympic games. As such, with violent terrorist acts occurring more frequently at the domestic and international level, this period in history would become the genesis of American counterterrorism efforts (Charbonneau, & Lillich, 1977; Evans, 1972; O'Donnell, 2006). However, American foreign policy would continue to frame the concept of terrorism in the context of political violence to be resolved by the police and international diplomacy, not as a military matter (Brzezinski, 1973; Garrison, 2003; Smith & Orvis, 1993; Roskin, 1974).

The Juxtaposition of Counterterrorism Strategy and Foreign Policy

United States foreign policy has long been characterized as an intricate balance between the complementary and conflicting demands of national interest and international responsibility enveloped by the dynamics of politics (Fearon, 1998). Similarly, the unique characteristics of terrorism have created a complex and problematic dilemma for the development of a counterterrorism strategy where perceptions can often result in as much damage to broader foreign policy goals as factual information (Bueno de Mesquita & Dickson, 2007). This is not to say that competing foreign policy goals should be cast aside in the pursuit of counterterrorism initiatives, rather winning the complicated fight against terrorism often requires significant trade-offs and difficult choices as far-reaching political compromises become the norm instead of the exception (Widmaier, 2007).

While the outcome of America's battle against terrorism has yet to be seen, the one certainty is that implementation of counterterrorism strategies in response to the events of September 11, 2001, have irrevocably changed the manner that United States foreign policy is developed and implemented (Gadarian, 2010). However, in as much as counterterrorism strategies have changed the political nature and public perception of foreign policy, the underlying fundamental causes of the growing terrorist threat to the United States remains essentially unchanged (Bulley, 2010; Enders & Sandler, 1999). Further, the United States has remained a preferred target for terrorism since the late 1960s having evolved from acts of violence in support of a political cause, religious beliefs, and disdain for American global power (Albini, 2001; Hoffman, 2002; Hagan, Everts & Stempel, 2001; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Silke, 2008). Nevertheless, counterterrorism strategies must still consider the ramifications of both action and inaction upon American foreign policy (Crenshaw, 2001).

Intelligence Gathering and Analysis

The failure to United States to adapt to the rise of terrorism and implement intelligence gathering reforms after the Cold War can be attributed, in part, to the self-interests of bureaucratic leaders who often failed to place sufficient focus on terrorist events and the importance of an effective counterterrorism strategy (Ikenberry, 2001; Zegart, 2005). Even after the events of September 11, 2001, it would still be three years before congressional passage of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA) of 2004 created an Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) to coordinate priorities, collection methodologies, and analysis practices between member of the intelligence community (Cumming, Best & Masse, 2005; Gentry, 2016; O'Connell, 2006). However, despite noted improvements in information gathering and analysis within the intelligence community, the ODNI has not been provided with the necessary span of control and authority to manage an intelligence community where the byzantine bureaucracy of sixteen diverse and often competing organizations can often result in each entity striving to show their independent relevance (Burch, 2018; Shelton, 2012). Additionally, notwithstanding that some improvements in information sharing have been made, disparate organizational missions within the intelligence community has preserved many past practices and traditions that often adds unnecessary constraints on intelligence analysis and information sharing (Barger, 2004; Maras, 2017; Travers, 2015). As such, interagency cooperation remains an inherently difficult endeavor given a culture characterized by secrecy and limited disclosure of information with little or no incentive for individual analysts to discard their traditional silo mentality and work as a cohesive team within the intelligence community (Dahl, 2017; Dorff, 2005; Harknett & Stever, 2011; Hughbank & Githens, 2010; Immerman, 2011; Lefebvre, 2003; Marrin, 2017; Rose, 2017; Travers, 2015; Zegart, 2005).

Terrorism as a Crime or Act of War

In all essential respects, terrorism is a form of crime requiring that counterterrorism actions be conducted in accordance with the rule of law and terrorists be afforded the same treatment as any other criminal defendant (Hendrickson & LaFree, 2007). This position is supported by the consideration that the result of terrorist violence typically entails the infliction of injury, loss of life, or the destruction of property, all of which are prescribed as a crime by the criminal justice system. Additionally, as opposed to an act that requires punishment under military purview, treating terrorism as a crime punishable through the criminal justice system has a delegitimizing effect by emphasizing the criminal nature of the event rather than the political or ideological motive of a terrorist's actions (Saul, 2010). However, in reality, terrorism is unlike other types of violence and presents decision makers with a paradox of developing counterterrorism policy that considers terrorism as an issue to be resolved through the criminal justice system or an act of war that would be better addressed by the military (McCaul, 2016).

In consideration that wars are typically fought between nation states, treating terrorism as if it were an act of war creates unique constitutional issues by implying that a terrorist organization has attained status of an equal partner with the United States (Barak, 2003; Bradley & Goldsmith, 2005). For this reason, the war model is typically more suited to terrorist threats that are decentralized and ideologically driven or are not deterred by traditional methodologies associated with the criminal justice system (Parker, 2007). Additionally, the war model is a consideration when there is a justifiable cause for the discriminate and proportionate use of force after all other means for resolution have been pursued and with the understanding that a terrorist group may be attempting to provoke overreaction through the use of a military response (Duyvesteyn, 2008; Roberts, 2002; Watkin, 2004).

The Politics of Counterterrorism Strategy

There is little argument that counterterrorism strategies are very fluid and subject to constant refinement. However, despite possible campaign rhetoric to the contrary, a complete change in policy initiatives during the transition from one presidential administration to another is rarely a watershed event for counterterrorism efforts (Edwards & Wood, 1999). Rather, the development of counterterrorism strategy is, in a broad context, a reflection of the political process reacting to perceived terrorist threats and the incorporation of long-standing American cultural values that define the national identity (Caudle, 2009; Crenshaw, 2001; Fisher, 2007). Further, decision-making of the executive branch is influenced by the intermixing of various internal and external factors in which one issue often takes precedence over the other to the degree that the development of a cohesive yet flexible counterterrorism strategy is, at best, difficult if not seemingly impossible to achieve (Abrahms, 2008; Brecher & Stein, 1969).

Ultimately, the political decision-making process can often result in differing tactical approaches that do not consider the underlying cause of terrorism and, therefore, impedes the implementation of an integrated counterterrorism strategy (Sloan, 1993). As such, well intentioned decisions to deter terrorism through coercion or assuming a posture of conciliation can both result in a continuation or increase of violence given that neither action addressed the concerns of the culpable terrorist group (Chalk, 1995; Crelinsten, 1989; Haider, Joslyn & Al-Baghal, 2006; Miller, 2007; Jackson, 2011; Schmid & Crelinsten, 1992). Further, the absence of a cohesive counterterrorism strategy in combination with a foreign policy agenda that promotes democratic values has the potential to spark international resentment of the United States as well as provide provocation for terrorist groups to implement targeted acts of violence against American assets (Gause, 2005; McFaul, 2010; Oberschall, 2004; Savun & Phillips, 2009).

Presidential Policy and Strategy

Until the mid-twentieth century, the United States had historically exhibited a policy of isolationism as presidential administrations attempted to avoid conflicts and balance the demands of national politics with international pressures (Modigliani, 1972; Putnam, 1988; Ruggie, 1997). However, after playing a crucial role in two world wars, the United States was thrust into a leading role in the global balance of power (Ikenberry, 2005). Conversely, as the United States achieved unmatched military power at the end of World War II, relations with Russia deteriorated into a Cold War standoff with the Soviet Union's refusal to relinquish control over territory that it had gained from Nazi Germany as well as an understandable sense of nervousness after the United States use of an atomic bomb against Japan to end World War II (Schlesinger, 1967). During this same period in March of 1947, President Harry S. Truman proclaimed that "it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures" and that American assistance "should be primarily through economic and financial aid which is essential to economic stability and orderly political processes" (Truman, 1947, p. 26). Afterwards, this point in American history would be commonly accepted as the fundamental turning point where the United States abandoned its policy of isolationism and began a decade's long battle to prevent the spread of communism (Gaddis, 1974). This narrow focus on Cold War policies would not change until the terrorist attack at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games and corresponding media coverage motivated President Richard Nixon to begin development of a counterterrorism strategy designed to harden targets, tighten transportation security, and enhance coordination between government agencies (Bremer, 1987). From this inauspicious beginning, the United States counterterrorism strategy would evolve through each presidential administration.

President Richard M. Nixon (1969 – 1974). The presidency of Richard Nixon is best remembered for his resignation from office in the face of nearly certain impeachment. During this period the American government response to the emerging threat of international terrorism was typified by a lack of attention on the part of the executive branch and ad hoc decision-making in response to increasing tension and terrorist activity in the Middle East (Williamson, 2015). Ultimately, under the shadow of the 1972 Munich Olympic massacre, President Nixon established the Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism (CCCT) that essentially did little more than provide a public perception that the government was coordinating efforts for responding to acts of terrorism (Donohue, 2001). Nevertheless, while President Nixon continued to maintain a flexible policy for combating terrorism, creation of the CCCT was an important first step in formulating an American counterterrorism strategy (Williamson, 2015).

President Gerald Ford (1974 – 1977). With the resignation of Richard Nixon in 1974, Vice President Gerald Ford fulfilled the remaining three years of the presidential term. While retaining the same policies and flexible strategy for combating terrorism as the previous administration, President Ford did not place the same level of emphasis on terrorism nor fully grasp the political threat of terrorism in the Middle East or the increasing Cold War Soviet dominance in Eastern Europe (Ribuffo, 1990). During this same period, President Ford also issued an executive order restricting intelligence gathering activities and enacted procedures that further constrained the intelligence community by requiring that reports be made directly to the president (Fleishman & Aufses, 1976). However, to their credit, midlevel bureaucrats within the administration did not share the same lack of attention to the increasing threat of terrorism and continued the effort to form an international coalition against terrorism as well as to sustain the Middle East peace process (Williamson, 2015).

President Jimmy Carter (1977 – 1981). The four-year presidency of Jimmy Carter was a tumultuous period in the counterterrorism history of the United States. The late 1970s marked the culmination of a decade-long increase in extremist violence within American society consisting of kidnappings, hostage incidents, shooting spree aimed at police, and the bombing of government and civilian targets across the nation (Poole & Poole, 1978). During this same period, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979, and the trend of neglecting American defenses would result in a disastrous military performance in the 1980 failed special forces rescue attempt of fifty-two American hostages being held in Iran (Gray & Barlow, 1985). Through it all, the Carter presidency embraced a counterterrorism and foreign policy of active diplomacy focused on the principles of human rights, nonintervention in regions that supported terrorism, and opposition of past Cold War efforts to contain the Soviet Union (Schmitz & Walker, 2004).

President Ronald Reagan (1981 – 1989). The two-term presidency of Ronald Reagan began in the shadow of the Iran hostage crisis and the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan (Patch, 2006). As such, President Reagan immediately pursued a dogged policy of containment and ideological warfare against Communism while simultaneously assuming a proactive, albeit inconsistent, stance against international terrorism that encompassed containment, deterrence, and the situational preemptive use of force (Simon, 1987; Zulaika, 2003). On the domestic front, a resurgence of radical left-wing leaders inciting violence within the United States became the target of political repression efforts with the Reagan administration considering these individuals to be terrorists as opposed to political dissidents or criminals (Zwerman, 1989). Yet despite a counterterrorism strategy comprised of a strong vision and decisive action against terrorists, the Reagan administration ultimately reverted to what would become a decade-long law enforcement approach towards terrorism (Enders & Sandler, 1990).

President George H.W. Bush (1989 – 1993). The single term presidency of George H.W. Bush was characterized by a pragmatic foreign policy approach challenged by the end of the Cold War and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (Starr-Deelen, 2014). More significantly, with fewer acts of international terrorism occurring and in consideration of the trend in treating terrorists as criminals to be processed by the criminal justice system, development of a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy was not viewed as an urgent issue (Busby, 1990; Farnham, 2004). So much so that a year after the bombings of French Airline Flight 772 and Pan Am Flight 103, the 1990 National Security Strategy did not identify details for combating terrorism and only briefly mentions the possible use of special operations forces during a low-intensity conflict (National Security Strategy of the United States: 1990, 1990).

President Bill Clinton (1993 – 2001). As the two-term presidency of Bill Clinton began there was a sense that terrorism no longer threatened the United States in consideration of ongoing Middle East peace process and collapse of the Soviet Union (Badey, 2006). Accordingly, with terrorism continuing to be viewed as criminal justice issue, the Clinton administration's first term would be exemplified by a low priority on terrorism that included a radical and comprehensive reorganization of American counterterrorism programs resulting in a much-diminished role of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in national security affairs, as well as cuts in funding for both counterterrorism and intelligence operations. (Arnold, 1995; Bingman & Pitsvada, 1998; Kagan, 2001; Lansford, 2003). However, by his second term in office, President Clinton came to recognize that terrorism was an emerging issue impacting the United States and began efforts to develop new approaches to fight future terrorist threats and support for a wide range of counterterrorism programs and policies as well as a focus on technological advances (Crenshaw & Naftali, 2005; Donohue, 2001; O'Hanlon, M. (2003).

President George W. Bush (2001 – 2009). As President George W. Bush began his first of two terms in office the administration's attention was focused on a wide array of foreign policy initiatives to include building a ballistic missile defense system, evaluating the feasibility of a Middle East peace settlement, improving relations with Russia and China as well as contemplating how to deal with rogue states such as Iran, Iraq, Libya, and North Korea (Skidmore, 2005). However, terrorism was not considered to be a high priority by President George W. Bush despite intermittent hostilities between the United States and Al Qaeda resulting from the bombing of two United States embassies in 1998, suicide bombing attack on the USS Cole in 2000, and conflicting views by some members of the presidential administration of an imminent terrorist threat by radical Islamism organizations (Byman, 2003; Leffler, 2011).

The events of September 11, 2001, significantly altered America's view of terrorism as long-term efforts were initiated by the United States to strengthen defenses against future terrorist attacks (Kroenig & Pavel, 2012). With President George W. Bush declaring that terrorism against the United States would be akin to an act of war involving a military response, the era of considering terrorism as a crime to be prosecuted through the criminal justice system would seemingly end (Jackson, 2005). However, a counterterrorism strategy that encompasses the use of the military in actions would prove to be problematic in justifying the use of force and determining the applicability of laws of war (Roberts, 2002). Consequently, the threat of terrorism after September 11, 2001, was used as a means of justifying new legislation that gave government agencies unprecedented power to collect and share information at the domestic level when individuals were believed to have a connection with terrorist activities (Deflem, 2004 Wolfendale, 2006). Further, to prevent future terrorist attacks, law enforcement agencies at all levels of government began a new era of information and resource sharing (Marks & Sun, 2007).

President Barack Obama (2009 – 2017). The two-term presidency of Barack Obama began with the intent of showing greater respect for American civil liberties as well as implementing a more restrained and consistent international approach to combatting terrorism (Desch, 2010; Heller, Kahl & Pisiu, 2012). Nevertheless, in practice the counterterrorism strategy of the Obama administration was characterized as a flexible approach to combatting terrorism by local forces acting in concert with American military personnel to systematically destroy and weaken the capabilities of terrorist groups (Carvin, 2012; Hoffman, 2009; McCricken, 2013; Pilecki, Hammack & Clemons, 2014). The pragmatic nature of the Obama counterterrorism strategy also allowed for the incremental escalation of military intervention as well as the use of decapitation tactics which sought to kill or capture leaders of terrorist organizations (Drezner, 2011). However, while decapitation of leadership can serve to hasten the demise of a terrorist organization, it is not as effective with more well-established groups and may serve as more of a catalyst for ideological support and radicalization efforts (Price, 2012).

President Donald J. Trump (2017 – Present). Despite campaign rhetoric calling for sweeping changes to the American counterterrorism strategy, immigration policies aside, the actions taken by President Donald Trump fit within the broad scope of actions implemented over the past decade (Brands & Feaver, 2017). However, after more than a year in office characterized by rapidly changing and often unsubstantiated foreign policy decisions promoting a position of isolationism, the Trump administration has yet to formalize a counterterrorism strategy (Ahmed & Cook, 2017; Hassan, 2017; Kaufman, 2017; Knopf, 2017; Yarhi-Milo, 2018). As such, while a countless number of dedicated professionals continue the day-to-day counterterrorism work of the United States, there is a likelihood that their efforts will fall short in the absence of a presidential guiding strategy (Badey, 2006; Geltzer & Tinkel, 2018).

Balancing the Past with the Present

A critical first step in developing a counterterrorism strategy is to balance the government's responsibility for protecting United States citizens with national security interests and international diplomatic initiatives intended to secure long-term preservation and enhancement of American society as a whole (Earle, 1966). The inherent difficulty in this political endeavor is to embrace the concept that a strategy is not synonymous with policy, meaning that once the national security and foreign policy is established, a counterterrorism strategy is then developed as a means to aid in fulfilling the strategic objectives of the United States (Strachan, 2005). The subsequent step in the development of a counterterrorism strategy is to consider issues in the historical context of past initiatives and cultural interactions by the United States and other nations (Copeland, 2001; Jervis, 2002). Accordingly, it is imperative that intelligence analysts and policymakers alike strive to look backward and reflect on decades-long hard-learned lessons from the past before looking forward in the development of any new counterterrorism strategies (Andrew, 2004; Marrin, 2012; Winfield, Friedman & Trisnadi, 2002).

Throughout modern history, terrorism has been widely misunderstood and characterized as a crime, act of war, political posturing, or religious issue depending upon the context of the threat and need to substantiate or advance government policies (Roberts, 2014; Schmid, 2004). As such, counterterrorism strategies have often been misaligned with the ideology and objectives of a given terrorist organization as well as the decision-making processes utilized by terrorist leaders to orchestrate attacks (May, Sapotichne & Workman, 2009; Trager & Zagorcheva, 2006). Therefore, it is imperative that policymakers gain a deeper understanding that the global image of the United States, foreign policies, and counterterrorism strategy are not separate issues, rather a part of an integrated effort to end terrorism (Peterson, 2002; Schake, 2017).

Discussion

The attack of the United States on September 11, 2001, was arguably as much the result of policy failures by the American government as it was a consequence of terrorist organizations adapting to American counterterrorism strategies and tactics. In retrospect, acknowledging that foreign policies and counterterrorism strategies appropriate for one period are often inappropriate for another, it is apparent that the terrorist threat to the United States escalated through the twentieth century as the result of the inability of government leaders to discern that changing times required different counterterrorism strategies to support the achievement of foreign policy goals. As a result, in the twenty-first century it is now more difficult to develop and implement a consistent and long-term counterterrorism strategy in the face of new waves of radical terrorism at home and abroad as well as public expectations for short-term solutions.

A critical first step in developing a proactive long-term counterterrorism strategy and associated tactics for preventing, detecting, and combatting terrorism is an effective intelligence gathering apparatus. In modern history, one of the more significant initiatives in improving the gathering, analysis, and sharing of information was the creation of an Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) to coordinate priorities, collection methodologies, and analysis practices between members of the intelligence community. Despite successes in information sharing at some levels within the government bureaucracy, the sixteen disparate organizations within the intelligence community continue to be adversely impacted by the inability to relinquish ways of the past and create a new culture necessary to function as a unified team. It should also be recognized that any actions to improve and streamline efforts of the intelligence community must consider both strengths and weaknesses of various agencies to preclude undermining the ability of analysts to address the specific needs of their customers.

A fundamental lesson of past efforts to combat terrorism has identified that a counterterrorism strategy based on principles of the existing criminal justice system where apprehended terrorists are accorded the same treatment of any other criminal defendant conflicts with considerations that violent terrorist acts constitute an act of war. Conversely, responding to terrorism as if it were an act of war can result in an overreaction through the use of a military response as well as implying that terrorist organizations are considered to be a nation state having status as an equal partner with the United States. Nevertheless, upon consideration of the dangers posed to innocent lives and the responsibility of the government to protect American citizens, prevention of terrorist acts through proactive military actions rather than punishment after the fact through the criminal justice system becomes the critical driver in counterterrorism efforts. However, this is not to say that the American criminal justice system should not be used as a method for disrupting terrorist activities through stringent enforcement of existing laws and passage of new anti-terrorist legislation, as well as the implementation of community policing efforts as a component of the intelligence gathering process.

Combatting the never-ending threat of terrorism requires a strategy as innovative and dynamic as that of the terrorist's ability to adapt and exploit vulnerabilities in American defense mechanisms. However, the counterterrorism strategies of the United States since the middle of the twentieth century has been marked by inconsistencies amid the unnecessarily complex government bureaucracy responsible for combatting terrorists. Further, despite political rhetoric associated with the importance of combating terrorism and some degree of consistency since the events of September 11, 2001, the differing policy and operational approaches of presidential administrations have generally impeded the development of an integrated long-term counterterrorism strategy for responding to both current and future terrorist threats.

Conclusion

Despite the growth of terrorist organizations over the past half century, little has changed in the overall nature of terrorism. Terrorists still target innocent populations and remain motivated by various ideologies that are used as a means of influencing behaviors through the threat or actual perpetration of violence. The culture, foreign policy, and projection of power by the United States still creates varying levels of resentment among portions of the world's population as well as serving to incite acts of terrorism. However, notwithstanding that most common attitudes and beliefs about terrorism are misplaced or inaccurate in many important respects, and even though government efforts to combat increasing domestic and international acts of terrorism have been ongoing for decades, it was the events of September 11, 2001 that became etched in the minds of most Americans as the starting point of terrorist activities.

The American war on terror as dubbed by President George W. Bush is, in reality, a prolonged, if not never-ending struggle to defend the interests of the United States and ensure the safety of American citizens. While there are varying levels of public opinion and support of American foreign policies and counterterrorism strategies, the organizational components necessary to facilitate the ongoing battle against terrorism by the United States is embedded in the complexities of government bureaucracy. As a result, the efforts of dedicated members of the intelligence community, military, law enforcement and other government agencies, have thwarted an untold number of active terrorist operations against the United States. Nevertheless, it is patently clear that efforts of past and current presidential administrations to squelch the terrorist threat is indicative of foreign policy initiatives and supporting counterterrorism strategies that are in dire need of a more consistent long-term approach for responding to the type of ubiquitous terrorist threats that will dominate future generations.

Recommendations for Improvement

Confronting the threat of terrorism is a challenge that requires the exercise of military power, integration of the criminal justice system, diplomatic engagement, and partnership with other nations. More importantly, there must be an unwavering bipartisan political effort to challenge and relinquish long-held beliefs that incite terrorist violence. Accordingly, in consideration of the issues as discussed herein, the recommendations provided below are offered as a means of improving the United States counterterrorism strategy.

Engage local law enforcement. Thwarting violent extremism within the United States presents a unique challenge to law enforcement personnel. This consideration is especially true in communities that are comprised of immigrants from countries where citizens feared the police. Accordingly, counterterrorism strategies must take a more aggressive stance in coordinating the community policing efforts of local law enforcement agencies to humanize officers, help shift prejudices, and establish partnerships necessary to identify signs of potential terrorist activity.

Streamline intelligence gathering. The intelligence community has had its share of failures, but as a whole, has provided a crucial advantage for the United States in the fight against terrorism. However, over time the American intelligence community has become overgrown and highly specialized at the expense of integration and collaboration. While reform efforts initiated after the events of September 11, 2001, have resulted in improvements, attempts to streamline the efforts of sixteen organizations and minimize redundant efforts has had the counter effect of creating new constraints and additional levels of bureaucracy. Accordingly, to address both current and future challenges, congressional actions should be undertaken to reduce the number of organizations within the intelligence community to a minimal number of primary agencies designed with a significantly less complex bureaucracy and reporting structure.

Examine existing criminal laws. The battle against terrorism has blurred the line between national security and the criminal justice system. Further, preemptive actions taken to deter terrorist activities often results in a myriad of practical and legal issues. Accordingly, while the criminal justice system is resilient enough to overcome concerns that the rights of citizens will be diminished, a critical examination of existing criminal laws should be undertaken to identify necessary changes to address the ongoing threat of terrorism within the United States.

Commit to long-term strategies. Notwithstanding the need for immediate adaptation of tactics in response to emerging issues, the long-term success of counterterrorism efforts is often adversely impacted by making changes for the sake of achieving short-term success. Further complicating the implementation of a strategy that requires time to achieve objectives is the presidential election process which typically results in a change of foreign policy goals with each new administration. Accordingly, the United States must establish a framework that allows counterterrorism strategies to transcend presidential administrations and party politics to provide all involved government agencies with the time needed to implement initiatives over the long-term while retaining the ability to immediately address challenges posed by terrorist activities.

Recognize that terrorism will not be eliminated. When viewed in historical context the United States counterterrorism strategy has arguably contributed to the evolution of more committed and dangerous terrorist organizations. Further, despite notable successes in deterring acts of terrorism and degrading terrorist's capabilities, a counterterrorism strategy that places the primary burden on military actions will ultimately fail. Accordingly, the United States must accept that terrorism in some form will never be eliminated but can be diminished through a generations-long strategy that tempers the underlying causes of terrorist's discontent and elicits global assistance to mitigate conditions that are conducive to the growth of terrorism.

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