

How Demonizing the Enemy is Counter-Effective to Foreign Policy Strategy

April 26, 2010
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Demonization and the politics of fear are widely used and perceived to be conducive to achieving one's objectives in international conflict. This common notion is, however, a gross misconception. Historical accounts point to negative and dangerous consequences to foreign policy stemming from the very atmosphere that 'demonization' produces. This paper examines three such historical cases: that of the Cuban Embargo, US policy toward Iran in lieu of the hostage crisis, and the ongoing War on Terrorism.

My analysis of the first case focuses on how ideological mindsets and perceptions left over from the Cold War are impairing rational policy change toward Cuba and the lifting of the US embargo. The second case aims to demonstrate how demonizing the Iranian leadership post the 1979 overthrow of the Shah politically backfired on US foreign policy goals by alienating Iranian moderates and fueling anti-American sentiment in the

mainstream of Iranian politics. The third case unravels the challenges posed by the threat of terrorism, how the US can overcome those challenges, and how transcending the discourse of terrorism is necessary to implementing the necessary solutions.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

The premise of this paper is to understand how demonization of the enemy leads to counterproductive foreign policy. In order to understand and correct this process, it is necessary to understand the theoretical framework which supports it. Simply, the model I apply holds that decision-makers are limited in their rational assessment of a situation by their perceptions, and that demonization of the enemy significantly contributes to the likelihood of misperception. Evidence for the merit of this model draws heavily on theoretical and quantitative research from the 1960s- appropriate since at the height of the Cold War many foreign policy analysts as well as psychologists were seeking to understand the nature of the US and USSR's adversarial relationship in hopes of preventing its feared cataclysmic conclusion.

Kenneth Boulding, of the University of Michigan, provides the foundation of the model by his understanding of the importance of national images. He asserts that state actors respond to the international system in accordance with their 'image' of the world. Because it is impossible to possess complete and objective knowledge, the spectrum of knowledge through which decisions are made and actions are taken is defined by the images a state has of itself and of other bodies in the system which constitute its environment. This is hardly an accusation of narcissism, but an observation rooted in

cognitive psychology. It is human nature to fit new information into existing patterns of understanding as often as possible. Gestalt psychology posits that the brain's holistic and self-organizing tendencies lead it to form principles of association in the rendering of perception. The classic psychology experiment of Bruner and Postman conducted in 1949 on the perception of incongruity demonstrated that it is more difficult for people to recognize an incongruous stimulus versus expected stimuli.¹ What this means for state actors is that, in making rational choices, defined by Boulding as "selecting the most preferred position in a contemplated field of choice," the field of choice and analysis of this field tends to be reconciled with the actors existing perceptions of how the world works, which is rooted in their images of themselves and other actors.²

National images are neither static nor singular, but a national image will inevitably, through education and socialization, be largely a product of its historical image. History, however, is never presented as an objective reality, and certainly reflects the vantage point of the nation. National image formation, therefore, will reflect the ideological underpinnings of a state's historical development. Most Americans' belief that their country's identity espouses exceptionalism and the struggle for liberty and democracy is nicely explained by Boulding's assessment of national image formation. However, it is in this fact that Boulding asserts the national image to be, "a lie, or at least a perspective distortion of the truth," and it is because of this possibility for distortion that, "love of

¹ Bruner, Jerome and Leo Postman, "On the Perception of Incongruity: A Paradigm", *Journal of Personality*, (1949) 206-233.

² Boulding, "National Images and International Systems", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 3;2 (June 1959), 121.

country is perverted into hatred of the foreigner, and peace, order, and justice at home are paid for by war, cruelty, and injustice abroad.”³

Boulding’s somewhat tangential conclusion stems from the fact that, in order to preserve one’s own national image, it is often necessary to peg it against an image of an ‘Other’, again a classical psychological process. But from this process comes the problem of state actions being responses not to objective reality, but to an image. Thus, Boulding concludes that often a state’s reaction will be determined not by ‘real’ hostility, but by its image of the hostility of another.⁴

Several scholars have sought to test the relationship between the kind of belief-system perception described above and decision making. Ole Holsti, of Stanford University, presented a case study in 1962 in which he analyzed US foreign policy toward the Soviet Union as crafted by John Foster Dulles. Holsti quantified Dulles’ statements and documents according to the “evaluative assertion analysis” technique devised by Charles Osgood to test whether information concerning the Soviet Union was perceived and interpreted in a manner consistent with Dulles’ belief system framework regarding the USSR’s ‘inherent bad faith’. Indeed, Holsti found that Dulles attributed decreasing Soviet hostility to the necessity of adversity rather than to possible Soviet change of character or policy. Most importantly, he concludes that, “as long as decision-makers on either side of the Cold War adhere to rigid images of the other party, there is little likelihood that even genuine ‘bids’ to decrease tensions will have the desired effect.”⁵

³ Boulding, 123.

⁴ Boulding, 120.

⁵ Holsti, Ole, “The Belief System and National Images: A Case Study”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 6;3 (Sep 1962), 252.

In a 2004 article for the *Journal of Peace Psychology*, Ralph White similarly examined ten instances of war from the past century that were characterized by problematic misperceptions. First, he was able to trace misperception to demonizing the enemy and rationalizing one's own war-promoting behavior, he then showed how this often resulted in an underestimation of the strength of one's enemy and therefore either increased the dangers of war or added to the problems associated with it. His examples ranged from Germany's initiation of World War I, US involvement in Korea and Vietnam, the Arab-Israeli conflicts, and the Cuban Missiles Crisis to current US engagement in Iraq. White concluded that while misperceptions do not always dominate war, its dangers are drastically aggravated by them. Furthermore, he identified demonization as a universal practice that occurs even when a country is justified in its actions and asserted that a measure of empathy on behalf of decision and policy makers is essential to avoiding unnecessary international conflict.⁶

Robert Jervis continued this trend of study with his own publication of 'Hypotheses on Misperception' in which he delineated fifteen separate logical conclusions based on the nature of misperception and its effect on decision making. Most notable in his work is his identification of a 'perceptual threshold' for decision makers. Jervis applied Bruner and Postman's experiment on incongruous stimuli to extrapolate that decision-makers require a greater preponderance of evidence to be convinced of an interpretation of information that is inconsistent with their expectations and belief systems. Furthermore, he identified that decision-makers face the dilemma of being 'too open' to alternative interpretations. By this he refers to the inevitable suspicion that an adversary's actions and rhetoric are

⁶ White, Ralph, "Misperception and War", *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 10;4 (2004), 399-409.

intended to mislead and deceive. Even though Jervis was able to propose several 'safeguards' against misperception, including such tactics as entertaining counterfactuals and being extensively briefed on opposing interpretations, he correctly acknowledged that many such measures would not be feasible under the time constraints of many decisions and crisis situations, even provided that an administration would consent to implement them.⁷

The remaining theoretical question relevant to this model is why such modes of perception not only continue to be entrenched in foreign policy making, but are actually fueled and encouraged. Boulding proclaimed that,

The national image is the last great stronghold of unsophistication. Not even the professional international relations experts have come very far toward seeing the system as a whole, and the ordinary citizen and the powerful statesman alike have naïve, self-centered, and unsophisticated images of the world in which their nation moves. Nations are divided into "good" and "bad" - the enemy is all bad, one's own nation is of spotless virtue.⁸

There are two main branches of explanation for why modes of perception are actively reinforced; one deals with a psychological assessment, the other with politics. From the perspective of psychology, perceptions are constantly reinforced because there is a natural desire to affirm one's identity. But the process of reinforcing perceptions is especially important when dramatic events take place. Therefore, in a time of war, or economic or social strife, a nation makes sense of what is happening to it by conceptualizing events through narratives, and the power of narratives lies in how well

⁷ Jervis, Robert, "Hypotheses on Misperception", *World Politics*, 20;3 (Apr 1968), 454-479.

⁸ Boulding, 131.

they are reinforced by perceptions and identity.⁹ Yet this still does not address why, in the process of reinforcing one nation's own positive identity, 'other' nations are ascribed with negative images.

Psychoanalytic theory, however, explains such reality distortions by a process known as defense mechanisms- serving to protect an individual (or in this case nation) from becoming aware of things which would cause him (or it) intolerable anxiety. Arthur Gladstone, of the Chestnut Lodge Research Institute, examines how the mechanism of projection is relevant to understanding the conception of the enemy. Projection is the ascription to others of impulses, feelings, and other characteristics which exist in an individual but which cannot be admitted to oneself. Whether or not a subject will use the mechanism of projection is determined by the extent to which an item is unacceptable to the subject's self image, the extent to which past history and personality make it possible to project, and the availability of a suitable object onto which to project- a suitable scapegoat. In the context of the international system, the application of this mechanism implies that when a state is faced with circumstances which are in conflict with the existing national image- circumstances such as policy failures, a lack of cooperation from other state actors, or outright aggression towards the state- it will rationalize those circumstances by attributing the faults responsible for those circumstances to other state or non-state actors. So, for example, instead of admitting that the state's foreign policy of intervention may be imperialistic and that is why its policies are resisted by other states and populations, it will project onto those other states and populations attributes of excessive nationalism, a desire

⁹ Hodges, Adam, "The Narrative Construction of Identity", Discourse, War and Terrorism, ed. Adam Hodges and Chad Nilep, Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture vol 24 (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co, 2007), 67-87.

to subvert international order, or even a desire to exploit said populations for their own ends.

Gladstone points out that understanding projection is especially important to situations in which two states are hostile toward one another. From the conclusions of this line of research, one can assume right away that each state will exaggerate the other's hostility and will be determined to interpret actions and rhetoric as having hostile intentions because of the state's own hostility toward its opponent. Therefore, in a situation of international conflict, perception and projection serve to elevate a situation's destructive potentialities.¹⁰

Still, states are compelled by more than psychology to reinforce the power of images and fuel demonization. First and foremost, the cultivation of a demonized image of the enemy serves to induce fear in a domestic population, and many political advantages are presented by the fear tactic. The 'politics of fear' is a subject discussed by many psychologists as well as political scientists and so the following summarizes the most basic conclusions of their studies.

Philip Zimbardo is perhaps the most notable psychologist who has studied how human emotions can be manipulated and exploited for political gains. In a 2003 presentation before the Smithsonian Resident Associate Program, Zimbardo outlined how governments take specific actions, both rhetorical and tangible (such as the institution of 'terror alerts'), to induce fear. This fear, he noted, produces observable effects on individual and group behavior: vulnerability, uncertainty, obedience to powerful authority, paralysis

¹⁰ Gladstone, Arthur, "The Conception of the Enemy", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 3;2 (June 1959), 136.

of action, maintenance of status quo, and a desire to punish scapegoats, among many others.¹¹

The effects on individual and group behavior have protracted cumulative political consequences. The politics of fear support the mass inclination to give up freedom in exchange for security, and likewise promote authoritarian leadership and conservative ideologies. Because of their uncertainty and vulnerability, the mass becomes too weak to be a “credible repository of political authority,” which thereby shifts the balance of power from representative to executive bodies, and from participation to decision-making, effectively making government and military actors more independent and powerful. The politics of fear necessarily polarize a population’s differences, allowing dissent within a society to be more easily alienated and repressed. Not only is the power of the existing authorities augmented, but moderate political actors are undermined and therefore the practical possibility for change in the balance of power is eliminated.¹²

So far, this section of the paper has demonstrated how images are substantively important to perception and analysis of information, and how this impacts the decision making process. It has also examined psychological explanations as well as political motivations for the use of polarizing images and demonization of the enemy in foreign policy. The next section will demonstrate how, in spite of its aforementioned advantages, this tactic is a failure over the long run. In examining three contemporary cases, I show that

¹¹ Zimbardo, Philip. Presentation at the Smithsonian Resident Associate Programme. (15 November 2003). <http://www.vodium.com/MediapodLibrary/library/stanford_psychology/index.asp>

¹² Stocchetti, Matteo, “The Politics of Fear: A Critical Inquiry into the Role of Violence in 21st Century Politics”, Discourse, War and Terrorism, ed. Adam Hodges and Chad Nilep, Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture vol 24 (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co, 2007), 223-241.

demonizing the enemy led to an economic failure of policy in Cuba, a political failure in the US-Iran relationship, and a strategic failure in the war on terrorism.

THE CUBAN EMBARGO

The most infamous case of an international battle of ideologies is, without a doubt, the Cold War between the US and the USSR. For many decades, tensions between the two superpowers defined the international system. The tensions not only affected the two countries in question, but caused them to struggle over influence of their neighbors and client-states. Cuba was one such battle ground, and indeed, the ideological confrontation over Cuba brought the world within a hair's breadth of nuclear holocaust in the mid 1960s. But the Soviet Union broke apart, the Cold War ended, and the international system changed immensely. While shadows of Cold War suspicions may still dwell in the depths of some politician's and analyst's minds, they do not affect international relations- in all cases, that is, except Cuba. Instead of dissipating along with other Cold War issues, Cuba has turned into a failure of US foreign policy. Despite changes in the international system, the US has not been able to change its policy toward Cuba. Diplomatic relations remain severed, and the anachronistic embargo is still in place, hurting the political, but especially the economic interests of the United States.

The History

Cuban-American relations have a long and tumultuous history. In 1898, the Cubans were fighting a war of independence from Spanish colonial rule. However, when the *USS Maine* was blown up in Havana harbor, the United States entered into the war, finished

driving out the Spanish, and, instead of allowing Cuban independence, made the island a US protectorate, bound by a military base and a peace treaty giving Washington veto rights over Cuba's national legislation. Although President Roosevelt repealed that status in 1934, Cuba remained economically dependent on the US, and heavily influenced by its politics. As journalist Roger Cohen recently described in an article for the New York Times,

Over the ensuing century, Cuba became the winter playground of Americans, a place to gamble, rumba, smoke puros and sip mojitos, the land of every vice and any trade... The mafia loved the island, the largest in the Caribbean; so did the American businessmen who controlled swathes of the sugar industry and much else.¹³

At that time the island was ruled by an oppressive military dictator, President Fulgencio Batista, and it was against his tyranny that Fidel Castro Ruz led a revolution in 1959. Castro's revolution was markedly populist, but by no means Marxist-Leninist from its inception. Certainly, the nationalizing measures and agrarian reforms Castro instituted hurt American business interests badly, but it was not until the US clearly signaled that it was not interested in maintaining relations with the new rule that Castro turned to the Soviet Union. As per a presidential memo from the 1961, Richard Goodwin, an advisor to the Kennedy Administration, attended a conference in Havana discussing the Bay of Pigs invasion earlier that year. During that conference, Goodwin says he was alerted that Che Guevara wished to speak with him. Guevara essentially said he understood that relations between the two states would be very rocky in light of the recent attempt to overthrow the Castro regime, however, he advocated a "Modus Vivendi" until such a time as their

¹³ Cohen, Roger, "The End of the End of the Revolution", *New York Times*, (7 December 2008)

differences could be more productively resolved.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the US mindset at that time dictated that one could not tolerate any sort of 'anti-capitalist' movements, and perceived subverting the regime to be its only option. The embargo that had been imposed on Cuba in response to the overthrow of Batista was widened under Kennedy in 1962 and again in 1963, at which point travel restrictions were imposed.

The embargo was, arguably, very effective in that it had huge ramifications. At first, it ensured the closeness of the Cuban-Soviet relationship, depriving Cuba of an economic alternative. What is most interesting, however, is that the embargo only intensified with the end of the Cold War. After Soviet dissolution and the subsequent withdrawal of Soviet financial support from Cuba's economy, the United States took measures to strengthen the embargo on Cuba. In 1992 the 'Cuban Democracy Act' was passed, and in 1996 Congress approved the Helms-Burton Act, also known the 'Cuban Liberty and Democracy Solidarity Act'. The legislature was controversial both for its stringent measures on Cuba years after the Cold War was over, and for featuring a measure of extraterritoriality, which penalized foreign companies that do business in Cuba by preventing them from doing business in the United States.

The Issue

The question of how hostile US foreign policies towards Cuba remain virtually unchanged, if not actually strengthened, in the face of dramatic system upheaval has drawn the attention of many scholars. In 1992, Carla Anne Robbins, posited that high-pressure domestic politics are responsible US hard-line position on Cuba. The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), a highly influential lobbying group with hefty financial

¹⁴ Goodwin, Richard, "Conversation with Commandante Ernesto Guevara of Cuba" *Memorandum for the President*, (22 August 1961) <<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/bayofpigs/19610822.pdf>>

resources and the support of many South Florida voters, has vehemently opposed any change in American policy that does not punish and isolate the Castro regime even more. Many members of the foundation are Cuban-Americans who want to do everything in their power to create hardship for Castro's regime, and they believe that harsh economic and political opposition from the US is the best way to achieve it. CANF's political clout is not to be underestimated. One Bush administration official said, "The Foundation has had a chilling effect on the debate. Any time anyone starts to think creatively about Cuba we're told: What do you want to do, lose South Florida for us?"¹⁵

But politics have changed since 1992, and Lissa Weinmann, of the World Policy Institute, points to a decline in Cuba-American hardliners. Polls have shown a fading ardor for travel and trade restrictions among 1.2 million Cuban-Americans. Likewise, a generational shift has been gradually changing the views of the community. CANF's leadership has been taken over by the original founder's son, Jorge Mas Santos, who has signaled that an internal debate is ongoing within the organization to support lifting some measures of the embargo. Other, less organized voices within the community are advocating open trade with Cuba because of the projected benefits to the Florida economy.¹⁶ Roger Cohen has also pointed out that voting trends have been shifting, as evidenced by the Obama elections. While Cuban-Americans usually support conservatives like Miami's three Cuban-American Congressional Republicans, their victory margins have narrowed. Obama actually won 35 percent of the Cuban-American vote in Miami-Dade

¹⁵ Qtd in Robbins, Carla, "Dateline Washington: Cuban-American Clout", *Foreign Policy*, No.88 (Autumn 1992), 163.

¹⁶ Weinmann, Lissa, "Washington's Irrational Cuba Policy", *World Policy Journal*, (Spring 2004), 22-31.

County, which demonstrates both his appeal to the younger voting populace and that populace's interest in a new strategy.¹⁷

Most importantly, as the influence of the hard-line Cuban-American community has been waning, business interests have grown more powerful. A report by the North American Congress on Latin America regarding US policy towards Cuba has documented this trend. After a three-day visit to Cuba, then-president of the US Chamber of Commerce, Thomas Donahue, became alarmed at what he saw as US corporations losing a lucrative market to foreign competitors. Upon his return he announced, "We're saying on behalf of the American business community that it's time to look at this another way."¹⁸ Since then, national business groups have been pushing to normalize relations, agricultural companies like Archer Daniels Midland and Cargill led efforts to allow food sales, and agricultural interests such as the American Farm Bureau Federation even backed measures as open travel. In 2000, under pressure from the farm lobby and major agricultural states, Congress acquiesced to allow some food and agricultural sales to Cuba. This victory led the US to become the largest exporter of food to Cuba, earning upward of \$600 million per year in 2008.¹⁹ And the pressure on Congress has not abated. Numerous groups have commissioned economic studies to prove their case to US administrations. In 2002, a study by former Department of Transportation economists found that the "total impact on the US economy of unrestricted travel to Cuba would generate up to \$1.6 billion annually, and somewhere between 17,000 and 23,000 jobs."²⁰ Corporate interests have also joined forces with congressional Cuba working groups to repeal laws that protect Cuban special interests

¹⁷ Cohen

¹⁸ Qtd in LeoGrande, William, "A Politics-Driven Policy", *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 34;3 (Nov/Dec 2000), 40.

¹⁹ Cohen

²⁰ Weinmann, 29.

(like the Helms-Burton Act), as they have such a damaging impact on American business opportunities and commercial leadership worldwide. The essence of shifting sentiments was best described by Michael Dow, the mayor of Mobile, Alabama, who said,

For 44 years communities in the South have borne the brunt of separation from our natural trading partners. It is time for Washington and Miami to bury the hatchet and give [us] a chance, through free travel and trade, to deal more effectively with Cubans at all levels.²¹

The Culprit

It is difficult to rationally explain why US policy toward Cuba has, to this day, remained unchanged. Neither a realist approach, nor a critical view of domestic pressures can adequately account for staunch opposition to reforming US foreign policy. It has been demonstrated that political pressures from the Cuban-American community have been in decline these last ten years, while parties with economic interests have become more vocal. And yet, it appears that their cries fall on the deaf ears of foreign policy elites. The NACLA report attributes the US's severely hostile and anachronistic foreign policy to "the ranks of unreconstructed Cold Warriors."²² Likewise in his article Cohen quotes Wayne Smith, who once ran the US Interests Section, saying that, "Cuba seems to have the same effect on American administrations that the full moon used to have on werewolves."²³ Cohen goes on to say himself that there is something about the Cuban issue that, "militates against the exercise of US reason."²⁴

²¹ Qtd in Weinmann, 29.

²² LeoGrande, 41.

²³ Qtd in Cohen

²⁴ Cohen

Two scholars, Jutta Weldes and Diana Saco, come to the conclusion that ‘the Cuba problem’ was constructed in such a way that state action has been, in large part, discursive. That is, it has been governed by a set of ‘socio-cultural resources used by people in the construction of meaning about their world and their activities’.²⁵ In their extensive analysis of the formation and development of US-Cuban relations, they find that, based on the way in which US foreign policy elites originally constructed the Cuban problem and the way decision-makers have been made to view the problem ever since, it is beyond their realm of understanding and possibility to envision a change in policy. For those elites and decision-makers, changing policy toward Cuba would mean undermining both their perception of Cuba and the identity of the United States as that of the leader of the democratic free world.²⁶

THE US AND IRAN

The case of the Cuban embargo demonstrates how demonization and belief systems are currently impeding upon progress in the US-Cuban relationship and harming US economic interests. The case of Iran focuses on how demonization has actually created problems in the US-Iran relationship, mostly through creating the perception of deep-seated Iranian anti-Americanism, and how this perception continues to hinder the paths of progress.

The Issue

²⁵ Weldes, Jutta and Diana Saco, “Making State Action Possible: The US and the Discursive Construction of ‘the Cuban Problem’, 1960-1994”, *Millennium*, 25;2 (1996), 372.

²⁶ Weldes & Saco, 392.

Iran has been portrayed as a hotbed of anti-Americanism long enough that it's all most Americans remember. Political cartoons about Iran from the last three years paint it as a country bent on destroying Israel with its vast nuclear weapons arsenal. Iran is "the state of denial, the state of confusion, and the state of ignorance", where women are oppressed beyond measure and madmen (or mad mullahs) run the show; Iran is "The World's Most Dangerous Element."²⁷ Newspapers and Magazines fail to add much insight with titles and headlines that cast the nation as hostile, incompetent, and incomprehensible ("The Enemy Within", "More Sabre-Rattling In Iran", "Smoke and Mirrors").²⁸ Even scholarship assumes the worst about Iran, putting the burden on authors like Trita Parsi to dispel common stereotypes. Her article of November 2007 dealt exclusively with proving that Iran is rational and can be deterred, that it is not inherently anti-American, that it does not seek Israel's destruction, and that it is not on the verge of building and using nuclear weapons.²⁹

The false assumptions and stereotypes surrounding Iran were not created overnight, nor did they come out of the blue. The demonization of Iran by US media started with the Iranian overthrow of the Shah and was cemented into 'party line' after the 444-day hostage situation at the US embassy in Tehran. Since the United States had supported Shah Reza Pahlavi, the revolutionary tides that resulted in his exile were viewed unfavorably by the media. They hardly recognized that the country was undergoing dramatic changes, that the regime of the Shah had been incredibly oppressive and violent toward its own people, and that different segments of the populace were warring with each

²⁷ Website compiling political cartoons about Iran

<http://www.anvari.org/cols/Political_Cartoons_about_Iran.html>

²⁸ Titles selected from articles in *The Economist* (November 15, 2007; July 9, 2008; May 29, 2008)

²⁹ Parsi, Trita, "The Iranian Challenge", *The Nation*, 285:16 (November 19, 2007), 23-35.

other, causing rioting and demonstrations that ravaged the social and political stability of the nation for several years. When the US embassy was overtaken by students and 52 hostages were held, all the media perceived and relayed to the American people was that power in Iran had been seized by radicals hostile to the United States.

Professor Edward Said wrote an article for the *Columbia Journalism Review* in 1980, while the hostage crisis was ongoing, that criticized the way the US press handled its coverage of Iran. First he pointed out how the crisis was actually heightened by the focused media attention given to it. Second, he showed how this attention hardly increased the American public's knowledge about Iran or the events surrounding the crisis, but did present an emotion-based discourse that played on pre-existing subliminal suspicion toward all things Arab and Oriental. "There was no inclination to accept the revolution itself as anything other than a defeat for the US, or as a victory of dark over light," he wrote, despairing over the lack of historical or political contextualization of the crisis in media coverage. "The news media, as well as governmental and academic experts, seemed to have agreed implicitly not to recognize political developments as political but to represent them as a cosmic drama pitting civilization as we like it against the uncivilized and the barbaric."³⁰

It was not difficult to portray Iran as uncivilized, barbaric, or even evil at that time because few Americans knew much about that part of the world or about Islam, its supposed single most important characteristic. Of course the news media did their best to redress this ignorance, airing voices that aimed to explain the militant, dangerous, anti-American ideology that was Islam. Said made examples of major TV commentators like

³⁰ Said, Edward, "Iran and the U.S. Press", *Tell the American People: Perspectives on the Iranian Revolution*, (Philadelphia: Movement for a New Society, 1980), 116.

Walter Cronkite and ABC's Frank Reynolds. He quoted Reynolds describing anti-Americanism as

[t]he crescent of crisis, sweeping across the world of Islam like a cyclone hurtling across a prairie" in the same program where he voiced over a picture of crowds chanting "God is great" with his own interpretation of the people's sentiment: "hatred of America".³¹

Articles popped up in all major newspapers and magazines that attempted to explain to Americans the upsurge in Islam and implications thereof for the Arab world. But most of these articles employed statements that, as Said declared, "would be considered either racist or nonsensical if used to describe any other language, religion, or combination of ethnic groups." All things Arab (which, of course, Iranians are not) and all things Muslim were equated to all things evil. One article from *The Atlanta Constitution* alleged that the takeover at the embassy had been orchestrated by the Palestinian Liberation Organization, other articles hypothesized that it was another group of Palestinian guerillas, and *The Washington Post* asserted that there was basis to believe that the culprits were well-trained Marxists.

If one were to read the *Chicago Tribune* citing experts who said that "this is not something that's up for rational discussion" or that Iranians have a "tendency to look for scapegoats" and "a sort of hunger for martyrdom", and then either *Time* ("An ideology of Martyrdom") or *Newsweek* ("Iran's martyr Complex") the week after, and almost any paper of one's choice the week after that, one would continually keep coming up against the information that Iranians are Shi'ites who long for martyrdom, who are led by a non-

³¹ Said, 116-117.

rational Khomeini, who hate our country, are determined to destroy the satanic spies, are unwilling to compromise, and so forth.³²

The History

The demonization that the media started in 1979 outlasted the hostage crisis and six Iranian presidents. While the American public was contemplating mad mullahs, a tremendous political game was playing out in Iran. The Shah, whom the United States had supported since the 1953 coup, had actually alienated most segments of his populace by 1977. The intelligentsia and the urban class had been against him for most of his rule, and his White Revolution wiped out support from the land-owning class of tribal chiefs and rural notables as well as worsened conditions for the shantytown poor. In 1975 he formed the Resurgence Party, which consolidated his absolute rule and led the bazaars and their closely allied clergy to join the Shahs most vocal and active opponents.

Official criticism of his regime began in 1976 with the publication of "Fifty Years of Treason" by Abdul Hassan Bani-Sadr, a future president, which accused the regime of fifty counts of political, economic, cultural, and social wrongs. By the fall of 1977 many middle-class organizations made up of lawyers, academics, journalists, merchants, students, and former political leaders were publishing open denunciations of the Shah's government. In 1978 the student demonstrations began. They ranged from (political) poetry readings at public universities to marches on police stations by seminary students. Many of these demonstrations resulted in clashes with authorities and casualties. Public strikes of solidarity with the victims followed and continued the cycle of demonstration. At the same time, the Shah's regime terrorized the population. Bombs were set off in cinemas of

³² Said, 120.

working-class districts and, on September 8th, a great massacre of demonstrators took place in Jaleh Square. According to figures from Martyrs Foundation, in the fourteen months between October 1977 and February 1979, 2,781 demonstrators were killed.³³ But, in the end, the voice (and blood) of the people left a 53-year-old dynasty and 2,500-year-old monarchy completely destroyed.

After the Shah was exiled a dual government came into place. Mehdi Bazargan was the official prime minister of the provisional government. He was supported by his own Liberation Movement and the National Liberation Front. Although he worked together with Khomeini, who held the greatest power because of his following of clerics, he and his supporters wanted a democratic Islamic constitution modeled on deGaulle's Fifth Republic. But Khomeini had established a secret Revolutionary Council, of which he was head, that oversaw the government and a Central *Komiteh* that consolidated power through local councils and courts. Khomeini refused Bazargan's proposal for a democratic Islamic republic, arguing that 'democratic' was a term that reflected Western principles and that the name of Islam, being perfect and complete, could not be improved by such adjectives. The referendum of April 1st produced a 99% YES vote for the Islamic Republic, with 95% of the electorate voting.³⁴

The constitution that was thereafter drafted created an intricate web of government that was supposed to have checks and balances, although they intentionally favored the clerics. The president, legislators, Majles, provincial and local councils, and the Assembly of Experts were all elected. Furthermore, all citizens, irrespective of race, ethnicity, creed, and gender were guaranteed basic human and civil liberties. These

³³ Abrahamian, Ervand, *A History of Modern Iran*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 160.

³⁴ Abrahamian, 163.

included rights of press freedom, expression, worship, organization, petition, and demonstration; equal treatment before the law; the right of appeal; and the freedom from arbitrary arrest, torture, police surveillance, and even wiretapping. These civil liberties were included because the revolution, after all, had been carried out with demands for liberty, equality, and social justice. Lawyers and human rights organizations had been important to the revolution, and its success had been secured through popular participation. At the same time, the nature of the newly created government was such that these liberties were not very secure since all legislation had to conform to the principles of Islam and the Guardian Council determined those principles.

Bazargan and his supporters tried to push for a more liberal constitution and threatened to present their version to the people directly. Had they been able to, historians believe the populace would have likely preferred Bazargan's version.³⁵ However, during these deliberations President Carter agreed to admit the Shah to the US for cancer treatment and the Iranian public was outraged. From anger over that decision, four hundred university students climbed over the walls of the US embassy and thereby began the hostage crisis. The students had been convinced of a popular myth circulating at the time, that the CIA was planning a repeat of the 1953 coup and using the embassy as headquarters to supplant the new government. As the crisis began, Khomeini submitted his constitution to the people and 99% again voted YES. However, this time nearly 17% of the population refused to vote.³⁶

While in power as prime minister, Bazargan had been an opportunity for Iran to develop as a more liberal and democratic republic. But Khomeini's revolutionary

³⁵ Abrahamian, 168.

³⁶ Abrahamian, 169.

organizations and other militant political forces pressured the Bazargan government, which was comprised of many moderate and liberal individuals, to resign. The Tudeh Party, the Mojahedin, the Fada'iyan, and other leftist groups constantly attacked the provisional government, accusing its members of disloyalty to the revolutionary cause. Particularly, they accused them of fraternizing with Western powers. Indeed, Bazargan had arranged for secret meetings between his foreign minister, Ebrahim Yazdi, and U.S. officials in an attempt to begin normalizing relations. He even met with President Carter's National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brezezinski, in Algiers during celebrations of its independence from France. However, when the US admitted the ex-Shah and the embassy takeover revealed the extent of US relations with Bazargan, massive anti-American and anti-liberal protests broke out. As a result, Bazargan and other liberal voices in Iran were alienated and silenced from within the country, and shunned from without.³⁷

Between 1980 and 1997 Iran had four presidents, the most notable of them Ali Khomeini (1981-89) and Rafsanjani (1989-97). When Ayatollah Khomeini died, Khomeini became Supreme Leader and Rafsanjani ruled. When his two terms in office were over, the Guardian Council permitted Hojjat al-Islam Sayyed Muhammad Khatami to run for president against the conservative Speaker of the Majles. Khatami, who ran on promises and his liberal reputation, won 70% of the vote with 80% electoral participation. He was supported by some segments of the military and seminarians and had great support from the middle class: college students, women, and urban workers.³⁸ His election was followed closely by electoral successes for reformers in local and parliamentary elections. Consequently, Khatami instituted many reforms in foreign relations and internal politics.

³⁷ Siavoshi, Susan. *Liberal Nationalism in Iran: The Failure of a Movement*, (Boulder: Westview, 1990), 134-151.

³⁸ Abrahamian, 186.

Political discourse was more open under Khatami, and several new reform newspapers were opened. He had success with his development programs in education, housing, and health care. The UN also dropped Iran from its list of human rights violators. Khatami's administration attempted to wrest some judicial power from the Guardian Council and fought against political assassinations. In spite of the great obstacle Khatami found in the Guardian Council, his presidency was rather successful.

In January 2002, President Bush delivered the following words to a joint session of Congress:

[Our] goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction. Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom. States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.³⁹

His State of the Union address hit Iran with a shock of political repercussions. As the *New York Times* reported,

Ever since President Bush designated Iran part of the international terrorist network open to America attack, conservatives in Iran have been buoyed, trying to use a resurgence of disgust with America to quash reform at home. This has made it harder for President Khatemi to preserve his reformist agenda for promoting democracy.⁴⁰

The conservatives consequently won the next wave of elections- the municipal councils in 2003, the Majlis in 2004, and, in 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became president.

³⁹ George W. Bush, *State of the Union Address*, (January 2002).

⁴⁰ MacFarquhar, Neil, "Millions In Iran Rally Against U.S.", *New York Times*, (February 12, 2002).

During the 1980s and 90s the United States was understandably preoccupied with containing communism and opposing leftist regimes. For those reasons, it might be understood why it kept its distance from Iran. However, President Bush's speech in 2002 undermined US foreign policy interests because Iran had been cooperating with the State Department on overthrowing the Taliban in Afghanistan. After his remarks, and for the rest of George W. Bush's presidency, the US administration was hostile toward Iran.

The US news media picked up and ran with the argument that Iran was an imminent potential nuclear threat, oxymoron though that may be. As part of the hype that exaggerated Iraq's weapons capabilities, Iran was also important in creating the image of a threat. But even after the Iraq war was underway and 'WMD's had not been found, pressure on Iran did not decrease. In April of 2006 MSNBC political analyst Monica Crowley was still insisting that Iran will have nuclear weapons soon, or may even have them already. In her discussion with host Joe Scarborough, Crowley drew up a scenario in which a 150 kiloton bomb was detonated in New York City in the heart of Manhattan. Upon being prompted by the host to discuss whether the "irrational" Iranian leaders would launch such an attack she answered:

You are dealing with a regime that's not logical... The president of Iran... really believes in bringing on a Muslim led apocalypse... The Tehran regime has missiles with which to deliver the weapons we're talking about... we may be talking about nuclear weapons that they may already have... There's no reason to suggest that the maniacs in Tehran would not give those weapons to al Qaeda and allow al Qaeda to go and do its dirty work for them!⁴¹

⁴¹ Crowley, Monica, "Scarborough County" *Morning Joe on MSNBC*, (April 17, 2006).

And just as the ‘mad mullah, bent on evil’ stereotype has remained unchanged, the willingness of US media and public officials to engage Iran diplomatically has not significantly grown. In September 2008 the Iranian president spoke before the United Nations General Assembly with quite a few issues on his mind. He blamed “bullying powers” for creating the world’s problems, citing six years of occupation in Iraq and sixty years of carnage and invasion in Palestine. According to CNN, the president told Larry King, on whose show he appeared, that he was willing to meet with then presidential candidates Senators John McCain and Barack Obama to discuss world issues and debate. At the UN, however, no US diplomat was present during Mr. Ahmadinejad’s speech.⁴² And the only words that Senator Barack Obama was willing to spare were:

I strongly condemn President Ahmadinejad’s outrageous remarks at the United Nations and am disappointed that he had a platform to air his hateful and anti-Semitic views. The threat from Iran’s nuclear program is grave. Now is the time for Americans to unite on behalf of the strong sanctions that are needed to increase pressure on the Iranian regime.⁴³

Of course Barack Obama’s attitude changed with his inauguration. In his very first address to the nation as president, Obama sought audience with the Muslim world, wishing to “seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect.” And reached out to “those who cling to power,” promising to, “extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.”⁴⁴ A few months later President Obama tried more overtly to thaw relations with Iran. In a speech transmitted both by radio and television, President Obama

⁴² “Ahmadinejad: American Empire nearing its end”, *CNN.com*, (September 24, 2008).

⁴³ Obama, Barack, *official statement*, Organizing for America.com (September 23, 2008).

⁴⁴ Obama, Barack, *Inaugural Address*, (January 20, 2009)

spoke “directly to the people and leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran.” First, he congratulated them on the occasion of the Persian New Year, Nouruz, then complemented Iran, acknowledging the accomplishments of that “great civilization”. Turning the message to Iran’s leaders, President Obama stated that despite the serious differences between the US and Iran, “The United States wants the Islamic Republic of Iran to take its rightful place in the community of nations”. This right was then tied to responsibility, cooperation, trade, security, and so forth. The President ended with the traditional Nouruz greeting in Farsi.⁴⁵

And yet, in spite of the new, conciliatory tone of the US government, Iran did not respond in kind. A few days later Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei also made a public address and rejected the US overtures. Khamenei insisted that the Iranian people would judge the new administration by its actions, not its words. He then recited a list of grievances against the United States and pointed out the hypocrisy of a congratulatory remark by the US president on the one hand and constant accusations of terrorism and a nuclear weapons program by US media on the other. Khamenei added that he would welcome a shift in US policy that lifted economic sanctions and retracted hostile propaganda.⁴⁶

The Culprit

The dynamics of US-Iranian relations reveal that politics of interest and identity are both at play. In the case of Iran, its identity image lies in nationalism and Islamism; in the case of the United States, in an affront to its power, legitimacy, and its place in the world. Iranian hostility toward the United States clearly aided US foreign policy officials in alienating Iran. Discourse of news media cannot be interpreted in isolation from the

⁴⁵ Obama, Barack, “Nouruz Greeting”, *Voice of America*, (March 29, 2009).

⁴⁶ “Iran’s Khamenei Says Obama Overture Not Enough”, *Los Angeles Times*, (March 22, 2009).

attitudes of official policy, so one can derive that those attitudes were also tainted by the instinct to respond with hostility to anti-Americanism. The media displayed not only hostility toward a nation with unfavorable views of the US, but an outright refusal to attempt to understand historically, politically, and culturally, the context of those negative views. Media discourse showed that as soon as anti-American sentiment was perceived, the response was an “us versus them” schema that impeded further understanding.

Unfortunately, so reductive a worldview guarantees continued confrontation.

As the United States demonized Iran for its anti-Americanism, Iran appeared more justified to itself in demonizing the United States. This surge of anti-Americanism was then easily manipulated by conservative elements in power toward their political interests- the defeat of liberal sentiment. At the same time, the US limited its own perceptions of the Iranian political climate and ignored the Iranian liberals, who were potential allies. Ignorance by the United States, coupled with accusations of Western sympathy, killed any chance that liberal movements had.

THE WAR ON TERRORISM

As has been demonstrated by the cases of Cuba and Iran, the consequences of demonizing the enemy and the discursive belief systems that decision makers hold have led to substantial failures of policy. The greatest influence and power that discourse and mindset wield over foreign policy, however, is in regard to the threat of terrorism. The short-sightedness and limitations induced by mindset have caused US actions to substantially contribute to the development of specific terrorist threats. Furthermore, due

to the very particular nature of terrorism and terrorist organizations, state actions demanded by our mindset have failed to effectively counter the threat and, in many cases, actually served to strengthen the enemy. In fact, our discourse on terrorism, including the demonization of the enemy, hinders this country from making the changes necessary to defeat the terrorist threat.

The History

Let us begin with Afghanistan, which actually puts us once again within the context of the Cold War. As the Iranian revolution unfolded and undermined the balance of Western and Soviet influence across the region, other leaders in the Middle East saw an opportunity to seize power. In Herat, Afghanistan, a rebellion was stirring against the Soviet-sponsored Nur Mohammed Taraki, a Marxist and reformist leader. With the bitter taste of failure in Iran, Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, recommended that the CIA endorse covert action in support of the Afghan rebellion. Soviet intelligence, led by Yuri Andropov, grew paranoid about CIA plots in Afghanistan and decided that the country could only be saved from such devious influence through full-scale intervention. In no time, each superpower's perception of the other's malicious intent and their compulsion to counter that intent led the Soviets into an invasion and the US to a close alliance with Pakistani secret services to help the Afghan resistance.

The US worked not only with Afghanistan's neighbor, Pakistan, but also with Saudi Arabian intelligence services, which promised to match US funding for the insurgency. Together, they funneled tens of thousands of weapons and ammunition to Afghan rebels.⁴⁷ The rebels were united by their anti-communist, anti-atheist, and, what we would latter

⁴⁷ Coll, Steve, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2004), 86.

term, Radical Islamist cause. The rebel's fight, because it was against our arch-nemesis, became our fight. CIA director Bill Casey was known for having come to the CIA, "primarily to wage war against the Soviet Union,"⁴⁸ and it turned out, in the words of Islamabad's CIA station chief Milton Bearden, that "Afghanistan was a little part of it."⁴⁹ Indeed, when the USSR decided to pull out of Afghanistan, the US could hardly process the information. Steve Coll relates that the US secretary of state George Shultz, "feared that if he told the right-wingers in Reagan's Cabinet what [the Soviet foreign minister] had said, and endorsed the disclosure as sincere, he would be accused of going soft on Moscow. He kept the conversation to himself for weeks."⁵⁰

At the same time, the Soviets tried to warn the US about the dangers of Islamic Radicalism, but the warnings fell mostly on deaf ears. Although the State Department attempted to pressure the CIA to cut its ties to Pakistani intelligence and its close associate with people like Osama bin Laden and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the CIA was not willing to see their allies against communism as a major future threat, and the fact that warnings were actually coming from Moscow only served to discredit the interpretation even more. In the end, the US chose to disentangle itself from Afghanistan only because the Soviet threat had been defeated. Humanitarian assistance continued to the country, as well as cash inflow from the sale of Stinger missiles back to the US. There was no follow-up assessment of Afghanistan's stability, the country was abandoned to brutal fighting and the radically Islamist Taliban was allowed to come to power.

⁴⁸ Qtd in Coll, 105.

⁴⁹ Qtd in Coll, 147.

⁵⁰ Coll, 186.

This inability, indeed unwillingness, to interpret the information available in a manner contradictory with existing beliefs came back to haunt US intelligence services in their failure to prevent the terrorist attacks of 9/11. According to the authors of the 9/11 Commission Report, “evidence gathered by the panel showed that the attacks could probably have been prevented.”⁵¹ So why, then, was the intelligence community unable to correctly interpret intelligence reports, gage that the threat was real, and prevent the responsible individuals from acting? Was it a lack of capacity to imagine such a dreadful attack? Evidence points to the negative. In 1994, a group of Algerians hijacked an airliner with the possible intent of crashing it into the Eiffel Tower. During the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, an alert was issued warning of the possibility of aircraft attacks. In 1998 there were reports of plans by al Qaeda to hijack a plane, fill it with explosive, and fly it into a US city, and in 2000 the Counterterrorism Security Group had devoted a meeting to airplane hijacking.⁵² In short, as the commission concluded, “the possibility was imaginable, and imagined.”⁵³

It stands to be argued, then, that what intelligence analysts failed to take seriously was the *will* and *ability* of the terrorists. Joseba Zulaika, a terrorism scholar intimately familiar with Basque separatist movements, entreats that part of the mind set and belief system of counterterrorism intelligence agencies is that, first, they do not link leads and evidence to “the humiliations, desires, and decisions of the despised enemy,” and, two, that they do not perceive the enemy as capable and intelligent- “the terrorists simply don’t have

⁵¹ Shenon, Philip, “Leaders of 911 Panel Say Attacks Were Probably Preventable,” *New York Times*, (5 April 2004) A16.

⁵² Zulaika, Joseba, *Terrorism; the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), 187.

⁵³ *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 345.

what it would take to pose a real threat to us.”⁵⁴ Terrorist experts do not seek to interpret evidence; they look for measurable and verifiable data to confirm their presumption of terrorist guilt. But in order to distinguish a bluff from a real threat it is necessary to understand the enemy, his motivations and desires, and this is something the intelligence community was not willing to do. Thus, the threat from al Qaeda pre 9/11 was severely underestimated.

And still our blunders and contributions to the terrorist threat do not end there. Most scholars and analysts now agree that the single greatest strategic mistake in the war against terror was the war in Iraq. Although it has been postulated that the Bush administration decided to invade Iraq for a variety of reasons, some of them ideological and less than honorable, it stands to be noted that the discourse of terrorism attributed significantly to their ability to persuade others of their objectives. Zulaika posits that, “when belief drives knowledge, the ordinary standards of factual evidence are supplemented with untested premises; nothing that might help unveil the secret of the evildoer should be discarded.”⁵⁵ And so, in post 9/11 America, the public hardly pressed the administration for proof of Saddam Hussein’s danger, his connection to al Qaeda, and his possession of weapons of mass destruction. As Dan Rather, an icon of American journalism famously confessed, “George Bush is the president... [If] he wants me to line up, just tell me where.”⁵⁶ Similarly, an officer of the Joint Chiefs said regarding Powell’s presentation on WMDs to the United Nations, “If he believes it, I believe it, because I put a lot of stock in what he says. And I figured out that people above me had information I didn’t

⁵⁴ Zulaika, 191.

⁵⁵ Zulaika 195.

⁵⁶ Qtd in Greg Palast, “Cowdise and Conflicts: The Lynching of Dan Rather”, *Censored 2006*, ed. Peter Phillips, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 402.

have access to.”⁵⁷ Both the public’s, officials’, and elites’ capacity for clear thinking were clouded by their fears of and beliefs about terrorism, and so the nation stormed on to its greatest failure yet.

The Issue

Having described the ways in which our actions have contributed to terrorist threats, it is necessary to examine the nature of the threat. The particular nature of terrorism and terrorist groups presents a kind of threat that is impossible to defeat without transcending the limitations that discourse, mind set, and demonization impose. In describing this nature I will draw heavily on the scholarly research of Louise Richardson, a preeminent terrorism expert.

The first thing to understand about terrorism is that it is a tactic, specifically one employed by substate entities in an asymmetric conflict. Second, one must recognize that terrorism is “fundamentally and inherently political.”⁵⁸ Third, the point of terrorism is “not to defeat the enemy but to send a message.”⁵⁹ So, in summation, terrorism is a tactic that involves violence or the threat of violence against symbolically significant victims and is a message targeted at a wider audience in order to bring attention to a political cause and possibly achieve political change. One very important point implicit in this understanding is that terrorists cannot function in a vacuum. As Brian Jenkins once observed, “Terrorism... is theater.”⁶⁰ And, as such, we set the stage.

The objectives of terrorist movements are twofold, Richardson notes. There are short-term organizational goals and long-term political goals requiring significant political

⁵⁷ Qtd in Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, (New York: Penguin, 2006), 92.

⁵⁸ Hoffman, Bruce, *Inside Terrorism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 2.

⁵⁹ Richardson, Louise, *What Terrorists Want*, (New York: Random House, 2006), 4.

⁶⁰ Qtd in Hoffman, 32.

change. More importantly, short-term goals are, historically, more important objectives for terrorist movements, and the purpose of long-term goals is often more so an issue of ideological sustenance and legitimacy. Richardson surmises terrorists' short-term motives as 'revenge', 'renown', and 'reaction'. Each of these motives underlines the role of publicity.

Exacting revenge is both psychologically fulfilling for individual terrorists and their collective cause and is psychologically traumatic for the target audience because it demonstrates terrorists' anger and determination. Renown involves generating publicity for the movement's cause as well as the movement itself. Attention to the cause is the inherent political part of terrorism, and publicity for the movement is an objective of self-preservation and augmentation of power for the organization itself. Furthermore, publicity spreads the fear terrorism instills, helping the organization achieve its aims.

Response is the most disturbing of the motives, because it means that much of what states do to counter terrorism actually feeds their needs. Terrorist organizations wish to illicit a response from states that would legitimize their cause and bring publicity to the specific organization. A state actor denouncing a particular terrorist organization or elevating it to the status of prime enemy or grave threat serves to show that the organization was powerful enough to invoke the wrath of the state and legitimizes the cause of the organization among sympathizers by reinforcing the image of the terrorist as a David against Goliath.

Besides the nature of their objectives and how we often play into them, the other important aspect to understand is that, due to nature of the source of terrorist organizations' power, it is impossible to defeat the organization without addressing the roots of its cause. Engaging in war against terrorist organizations is essentially like

engaging in battle with a hydra. You cut off one head, three more grow back; you capture or kill one hundred terrorists and insurgents, three hundred more recruits volunteer to take their place. Bruce Hoffman spends some time debunking the myth of military retaliation as an effective deterrent for terrorism. In the three months after US air strikes on Tripoli and Benghazi in response to Libyan-backed terrorism, which the Reagan administration claimed would send a powerful deterrent message to other terrorists elsewhere, more terrorists attacked American targets than in the three-month period preceding the US response.⁶¹ This happens because terrorism is political. In fighting the terrorists directly (ie by waging war rather than through intelligence), a state demonstrates its refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of terrorists' political goals, thereby reinforcing the perception that terrorist are fighting against injustice, at least among those who sympathize with those goals, and therefore pushes those sympathizers to become recruits.

Based on these understandings, Richardson proposes several rules by which the terrorist threat can be counteracted. Three of these will be addressed in the following section, with an eye to examining how discourse and mind set must be transcended, and demonization eliminated in order for them to be employed.

1. Have a Defensible and Achievable Goal

Defeating terrorism or eliminating terror, is simply impossible; containing the threat from terrorist is, however, achievable. Considering that the current terrorist threat is posed by Islamic militants, our goal today, as Richardson concludes, should be to stop the spread of Islamic militancy.

⁶¹ Hoffman, 264.

If we were to keep this more modest and more concrete goal firmly in sight and plan accordingly, we would be able to ensure that our short-term tactics did not undermine the effort to realize our long-term objectives... The prevention of the spread of Islamic militancy is ultimately a political rather than a military goal... We need to ensure that military actions do not make political goals harder to accomplish.⁶²

But setting specific goals and carefully defining one's enemies is not in line with the discourse and belief systems regarding terrorism. Terrorism, terrorists, and their ideologies are routinely demonized and equated with evil. While Richardson says that one advantage of the achievable goal approach lies in that it affords political leadership the time and opportunity to educate the public to the nature of the threat, previous research on discourse noted in this paper shows that political leadership sees advantage rather in exaggerating the threat to the public in order to create an atmosphere of vulnerability and submission among the public. Not only does such an atmosphere present greater independence and power to the leadership, but a Manichaeian understanding of the threat reinforces the leadership's and the state's image of righteousness. If leaders were to follow Richardson's advice and describe the true nature of the threat, they would have to admit that the state's own actions and policies are to some extent responsible for the complaints espoused by terrorists' political causes.

Richardson also notes that in order to ensure the compatibility of short-term and long-term tactics, a combination of coercive and conciliatory policies would be necessary. Coercive policies should be restricted to the actual perpetrators of violence, while potential

⁶² Richardson, 204.

recruits and sympathizers should be engaged with through conciliatory policies. This idea is reinforced by the findings of the 9/11 commission, in which the authors said that, “analysts could have shed some light on what kind of ‘opportunity for dialogue’ al Qaeda desired.”⁶³ Yet, this essentially amounts to breaking the cardinal rule of counterterrorism—we don’t negotiate with terrorists.

In reality, negotiating with terrorists can be a very effective policy, especially considering how all-encompassing the term ‘terrorist’ becomes once discourse has come into play. In Iraq, for example, General Petraeus avoided an all-out confrontation with Muqtada al-Sadr and tried dialogue with the moderate members of his group. He also forged an alliance with Abu Abid’s Sunni militia to enhance the success of the ‘surge’. Petraeus said that, “the official goal was not a classic military defeat of the enemy but rather a negotiated settlement.”⁶⁴ The result was that the US was able to offer the insurgents a new option instead of treating them as the enemy. Indeed, it is possible to imagine that if the US leadership were to give more credence to conciliatory policies, people who dedicate themselves to terrorist organizations might be persuaded that this is not their only option. However, doing so would necessitate breaking the mindset that we will not negotiate with terrorists, and the portrayal of terrorists as hateful barbarians bent on destroying our freedom.

2. Live by your principles

There is a widespread and quite fallacious view that democracies are peculiarly vulnerable to terrorism and that the freedoms granted citizens in

⁶³ *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 345.

⁶⁴ Qtd in Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 177.

democratic societies can be exploited by terrorists and therefore must be curtailed...

To alter one's government in response to a terrorist threat is to concede a victory to the adversary.⁶⁵

Sadly, this rule was very much broken in the US response to terrorist attacks and its subsequent war in Iraq. Liberties were curtailed at home and laws were written in such a way as to allow insurgents and terrorist suspects to be classified 'non-combatants' and excluded from the protections of the Geneva Conventions. The CIA engaged in 'extraordinary rendition', whereby suspects were taken to undisclosed locations where torture would be an ensured interrogation method. Arab-Americans were detained without due process and sent to Guantanamo bay, where many were mistreated, not to mention the atrocious abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib.

Part of the reason why such measures were allowed and specific abuses, if they were not systematic, did indeed occur is due to the discourse adopted by political leadership. In adhering to an image of one's own righteousness and the evil intent of the enemy, it becomes natural and necessary to demonize the enemy. Natural because it reinforces one's conviction of righteousness, and necessary in order to make clear to the world at large the true nature of one's enemy. Demonization of the enemy becomes an imperative, so does his dehumanization and, subsequently, otherwise abhorrent acts against the enemy are compelled to become completely appropriate.

Zulaika describes this phenomenon as a function of 'exceptionality'. Because counterterrorist ideology arrives at the conclusion that terrorist violence is unlike any other, a state of exception becomes a necessary condition for fighting the spectral enemy.

⁶⁵ Richardson, 206.

“The exceptional became normalized because of the beliefs, fears, and prophecies of a new culture of terrorism that is subversive of what we have known until now as the rule of law.”⁶⁶ In other words, terrorists are less than human barbarians and outside the realm of law, which means that we are not ethically constrained by the law in fighting them. If we wish to live by our principles in the fight against terrorism, we must first view our enemies in such a way as grants them the human privilege of being party to our principles.

3. Separate the Terrorists from Their Communities

In order to stop the spread of Islamic militancy, we must understand the nature of its appeal and endeavor to counter it. This means that the focus of our counterterrorism strategy... [should be] on the potential recruits of terrorist group, the communities from which they derive their support... Terrorism requires a combination of an alienated individual, a complicit society, and a legitimizing ideology.⁶⁷

This final commandment is twofold- to separate terrorists from their communities one must empathize with one's enemy in order to correctly identify him, and empathize with his motivations in order to understand why he is supported by the community. In dealing with the intelligence community's inability to adequately recognize the terrorist threat prior to 9/11, I have already discussed the role of mindset and discourse in hindering the state from identifying credible terrorist threats. To admit that transcending Manichaeian and demonizing mindsets is required to be able to empathize with an enemy's desires and motivations is hardly arguable.

⁶⁶ Zulaika, 31.

⁶⁷ Richardson, 215-216.

The second part of Richardson's rule, though, is worth expanding upon. Although it may seem obvious that leaders must know to separate their enemies from the communities that support them, it is surprisingly rarely accomplished. One of the most demonstrative examples of this failure was Paul Bremer's role as head of the Provisional Coalition Authority in Iraq. Acting, contrary to recommendations from the military, Bremer dismissed five hundred thousand Iraqi state workers on account that they were contaminated by the Baath party's evil. As would be expected, many of those workers- mostly doctors, teachers, and soldiers- opted to join the insurgency. Bremer's actions, and his demonstrated belief in contagion by association, served to alienate a segment of the population which could have supported a new government in Iraq.

Likewise, US leadership alienated American Muslims and Arabs within the United States. In response to 9/11, the government picked up about 1,200 Arab Americans and detained them for months without access to counsel or other protections.⁶⁸ Capitalizing on the alienation of segments of domestic populations, terrorist recruitment efforts have started focusing on Muslim youth living Western countries.⁶⁹ To prevent the success of such efforts, it is necessary for the United States to stop dividing the world into good and evil, us and the terrorists. By letting down its guard and recognizing that its own actions might have contributed to the grievances at the heart of terrorist group's political causes, it can prevent those who sympathize with said grievances from concluding that belong with the 'evil' and 'terrorists'.

The Culprit

⁶⁸ Richardson, 193.

⁶⁹ Hoffman, 288.

In examining the nature of the threat of terrorism it becomes clear that battling it through purely military and intelligence tactics will be unproductive. Engaging in such a battle would lead to a catch-22. As Donald Rumsfeld expressed in a frustrated memo; "Are we capturing killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us?"⁷⁰

Terrorism is inherently political and, as such, requires a political solution. Without a doubt, in order for long-term counterterrorism objectives to be achieved, the US will need to change certain of its foreign policies in the Middle East. But for any of that to happen it will first have to change its perception of the problem and its relationship to the enemy. If, as previously noted, terrorism is theater, then we set the stage. Zulaika calls terrorism a rhetorical phenomenon- the thing itself is the reactions it provokes.⁷¹ As the recipients of the terrorists' message and the determinants of the response, we (the state and the public) are responsible for the environment in which terrorists function. If we succumb to absolutizing the conflict and demonizing the enemy, we perpetuate the very conditions upon which terrorism thrives. In refusing to negotiate and recognize their grievances we allow for no alternative but their asymmetric tactics. In recognizing terrorist organizations as the problem and dismissing the reasons for their existence we allow ourselves to fight the enemy, but reject the possibility of empathizing with the enemy so we can win.

⁷⁰ Qtd in Richardson, 217.

⁷¹ Zulaika, 22.

BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

The three cases presented in this paper have demonstrated how images, mindset, and demonization have led and contributed to policy failures. Our stalemate on the issue of the Cuban Embargo shows how the failure to transcend ideological mindsets has prevented sound economic policy. Our tattered relationship with Iran is a testament to the power of images and demonization to inhibit effective political engagement. And our record with the war on terrorism shows that we must fundamentally change our perception and engagement with the enemy if we are to implement the policies necessary to contain and defeat the current terrorist threat.

I would like, for a moment, to return to Boulding's theory of national images. He asserted that two types of image conflicts exist- real and illusory. 'Real' image conflicts constitute the condition that the realization of one would prevent the realization of the other, as would be the case of two nations claiming the same territory or two opponents espousing incompatible objectives for the future. 'Illusory' conflicts arise when,

there exist a condition of compatibility which would satisfy the 'real' interests of the two parties, but in which the dynamics of the situation or the illusions of the parties create a situation of perverse dynamics and misunderstandings, with increasing hostility simply as a result of the reactions of the parties to each other, not as a result of any basic differences of interest.⁷²

Most importantly, Boulding maintains that even 'real' incompatibilities are functions of the national images rather than of physical fact and are therefore *subject to change and control*.

⁷² Boulding, 130.

Assuming the validity of his claim, the onus is certainly on all of us, as citizens or as future elite and decision-makers, to countenance changing the images we hold. Empathy is not sympathy, and challenging the existing images of our country and our 'enemy' does not constitute betrayal of our principles or patriotism. The world has changed in such a way that each nation can no longer maintain an absolutist view of itself in opposition to other states and entities. If there is a clash of civilizations, the clash is of our own making, and can likewise be disabled by a restructuring of how we perceive the world.

"Resisting discourse is not an act of disloyalty; it is an act of political self-determination; and it is absolutely necessary if we are to avoid another stupefying period of fear and violence like the Cold War."⁷³

⁷³ Jackson, Richard. "Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism" (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 179.