SUCCESS WITHOUT VICTORY

America won the Cold War because Americans embraced a set of strategic principles and pursued them steadily, decade after decade. Here's the outline of a "containment" strategy for the age of terror

BY JAMES FALLOWS

The first person I heard discuss the terrorist threat to America was a man named Brian Michael Jenkins. This was back in 1978, at a conference in Berlin. At the time, people who thought about defense mainly thought about the Soviet nuclear arsenal or the aftereffects of Vietnam.

Yet at this conference Jenkins, then in his mid-thirties and a scholar at the RAND Corporation, explained that even a power as fearsome as the Soviet Union might not be the worst threat to the United States and its allies in the long run. "We are approaching an age in which national governments may no longer monopolize the instruments of major destruction," he said. "The instruments of warfare once possessed only by armies will be available to gangs. It will not be possible to satisfy the real or imagined grievances of all the little groups that will be capable of large-scale disruption and destruction, or to defend everyone against them … In the future, warfare—highly destructive warfare—may be waged without the necessity for armies and governments, by people with little to lose."

When I came across notes from that conference recently, Jenkins's comments drew my attention in a way they hadn't the first time around. I mention them here less to establish his prescience (he had made similar arguments in a 1975 book) than to illustrate how long he has been thinking about the subject. For most of the past thirty years he has worked as an anti-terrorism expert in the government, at RAND, and in a private risk-consulting firm. He looks nothing at all like the former governor Jesse Ventura or the former deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage—two bald, burly, aggressive-sounding veterans of U.S. Navy training. But Jenkins, who is lanky and elegantly dressed and roughly resembles the actor Roy Scheider, is a former Army Green Beret who served during the invasion of the Dominican Republic and in Vietnam; as with Ventura and Armitage, I have felt when seeing Jenkins every few years that it would not be surprising to find him crawling under barbed wire with a dagger in his teeth.

In short, Jenkins is no softie. But when I spoke with him a few days after the presidential election, he lamented the meaningless tough talk about terrorism that he had heard from both candidates. Among his colleagues in the anti-terror and counterinsurgency business, he said, "there is a recognition that we have to get beyond just shooting terrorists." They understand that this struggle will be with us for a very long time, that success will mean reducing rather than absolutely eliminating the threat of attacks, and that because there is no enemy government or army to surrender, there can be no clear-cut moment of victory. "Ironically, when President Bush said this in the campaign, he was immediately jumped upon," Jenkins said. "It was a moment of truth for which he was promptly punished. Senator Kerry had a similar moment, when he said that the objective was to reduce terrorism to no more than a nuisance. Conceptually that was quite accurate, even if it was not the most felicitous choice of words. And he was punished too. In a campaign with a great deal of nonsense about the threat of terrorism, these two moments of truth were mightily punished, and the candidates had to back away and revert to the more superficial and less supportable assertions."

Superficial or make-believe political discourse is not the fundamental problem in some areas of public life. Take Iraq: America's main challenge is not that people are reluctant to discuss their good ideas for speedy progress toward a stable society and a quick removal of U.S. troops. It is that good ideas don't exist. But after spending a long time listening to, talking with, and reading about people in the United States and elsewhere who are involved in the struggle to control terrorism, I think that in this area our constrained public discourse is much of the problem.

Good ideas about coping with terrorism do exist. They are available practically by the metric ton. My desk groans beneath the reports from high-level federal commissions alone. Most recently there was the 9/11 Commission, but before that came the Deutch Commission and the Gilmore Commission and the Bremer Commission and the Hart-Rudman Commission. Just after George W. Bush took office this last group warned that America's big challenge in the years ahead would be mass-casualty attacks on its cities. Americans who took the time to read some or all of these reports might not feel calmer about the world, but they would think that the studies represent public money well spent. And the commission reports are just the beginning. Late last year the Century Foundation released Defeating the Jihadists, by the former chief of White House anti-terror efforts, Richard Clarke, which included a sweeping list of recommendations. The war colleges, the Council on Foreign Relations, scholars in the political-science and public-policy departments of most major universities, and numerous independent researchers have all published books or monographs containing detailed action plans.
The problem really is not the lack of sensible answers. It is the reluctance to present them. In public it is hard for politicians to say things their backers don't already agree with. Yet doing just that constitutes leadership, and a re-elected president has a chance to demonstrate leadership—in this case by laying out the hard truths that people waging this struggle clearly understand.

For instance: This "war" will never be over, unlike the Civil War, the Vietnam War, or even the current war in Iraq. There will always be a threat that someone will blow up an airplane or a building or a container ship. Technology has changed the balance of power; it is easier for even a handful of people to threaten a community than it is for the community to defend itself. But while we have to live in danger, we don't have to live in fear. Attacks are designed to frighten us even more than to kill us. So let's refuse to magnify the damage they do. We'll talk about the risk only when that leads to specific ways we can make ourselves safer. Otherwise we'll just stop talking about it, as we do about the many other risks and tragedies inevitable in life. We will show that we are a free, brave people by controlling our fears. We admired Britain during the Blitz because people went about their lives rather than fretting at every minute that they might die. Let us be admirable in the same way.

In addition to being brave we have to be serious. We cannot waste any more time on make-believe. Make-believe includes arguing about whether our efforts should be like crime-fighting or war-fighting. They should be like both—and like a public-health campaign, a propaganda effort, and many other models that might prove useful. Make-believe involves measures that seem impressive but do not make us safer, such as national threat-level warnings and pro forma ID checks. The most damaging form of make-believe is the failure to distinguish between destructive but not annihilating kinds of attack we can never eliminate but can withstand and the two or three ways terrorist groups could actually put our national survival in jeopardy. We should talk less about terrorism in general and more about the few real dangers.

A full agenda for reducing harm from terrorism would fill many thousands of pages and encompass many hundreds of long-term action points. But a change of mind on just three points might help break the logjam. They involve the threats we try to defend against, the ideas we try to project, and the problems we act on first.

**Homeland Security: Keep Your Shoes On**

Screening lines at airports are perhaps the most familiar reminder of post-9/11 security. They also exemplify what's wrong with the current approach.

Many of the routines and demands are silly, eroding rather than building confidence in the security regime of which they are part. "You can't go through an airport line without thinking 'This is dumb,'" says Graham Allison, the author of the recent *Nuclear Terrorism: The Ultimate Preventable Catastrophe*, and the director of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, at Harvard, which conducts many projects on anti-terrorism and security. "You have the two people whose job is to see if the name on your driver's license is the same as the name on your ticket—as if any self-respecting terrorist would fail to think of that. You have the guy whose job is to shout out a reminder for you to take off your jacket and get your computer out of your bag. You've got one-year-olds taking off their shoes. It is hard to think of a way you could caricature it to make it look sillier." At the same time, the ritual manages to be intimidating, as a standing reminder of how much Americans have to fear.

The airport screening process is surprisingly expensive, directly costing the Transportation Security Administration more than $4 billion a year. According to the Air Transport Association, the airline trade group, U.S.-based airlines spend about that much again—$3.8 billion—in security fees and other direct and indirect costs such as free first-class seats for air marshals. For purposes of comparison, the airlines' total losses for 2004 are likely to be about $4 billion.

Are the measures worthwhile? They certainly reduce one specific danger: that a plane will be brought down by a shoe bomb or some other explosive device concealed in a passenger's clothes or carry-on luggage. But they probably make no difference in the odds of another 9/11-style attack, now that cockpit doors have been reinforced and passengers know they must not let a hijacker succeed. And they also do nothing to reduce the risk of explosions in the cargo hold, since most airborne cargo containers are not screened at all, even when carried on passenger airplanes.

In a larger sense, such extensive screening at airports may actually make America more vulnerable, because of all the things the Transportation Security Administration is neglecting to do as a result. The TSA has a total budget of some $5.3 billion—more than 80 percent of which goes to airport screening. Although there is some money for transportation security in other parts of the federal budget, the TSA, which is supposedly responsible for all modes of transportation, has well under $1 billion for everything except airlines: roads, bridges, subways, tunnels, railroads, ports, and other facilities through which most of the nation's people and commerce move. "Nobody can 'prove' that it's wrong to have so little left for ports and roads and railroads, because nobody has done the analysis," says Daniel Prieto, who has worked as an investment banker and as a staff member for the House Select Committee on Homeland Security, and is now at the Belfer Center. "There is no good guide to prioritize what to protect. But it sure doesn't seem right, when trucks account for 70 to 80 percent of all shipping in the United States; when terrorist attacks globally, like the Madrid
bombing, show that land-based transportation targets are among the deadliest and most easily hit; and when experts view insecure ports and cargo containers as among the most likely means of WMD entering the United States." Marc Sageman, a former CIA case officer and the author of the book Understanding Terror Networks, says that with the disruption of its training bases and communications systems, al-Qaeda will find it harder to launch a complex 9/11-scale operation anytime soon. "The future is Madrils," he says—smaller, localized attacks that still do great damage.

Prieto argues that the roughly $4 billion now going strictly toward airline passengers could make Americans safer if it were applied more broadly in transportation—reinforcing bridges, establishing escape routes from tunnels, installing call boxes, mounting environmental sensors, screening more cargo. All these efforts combined now get less than $300 million a year, which will drop to $50 million next year.

Rationally, this is an easy tradeoff: less routine screening of passengers who don't call out for special attention (watch lists, travel and spending patterns, and other warning mechanisms can be improved), in exchange for more and faster work to reduce the vulnerabilities of bridges, tunnels, and ports. In wartime a commander would easily make such a decision to protect his troops. But politically this decision is almost impossible. Such a tradeoff would make it likelier that some airplane, somewhere, would be blown up. If that happened, whoever had recommended the change would be excoriated—even if more people had been spared equally gruesome fates in subways or near ports.

"Terrorism is simply too cheap, too available, and too tempting to ever be totally eradicated," says Stephen Flynn, the author of the recent book America the Vulnerable. Flynn is a former Coast Guard officer who has worked on the National Security Council and for the Hart-Rudman Commission. "What is required is that everyday citizens develop both the maturity to live with the risk of future attacks and the willingness to invest in reasonable measures to mitigate that risk." This point seems obvious, but so far it has escaped mention by our president or vice-president. Since the very point of terrorism is to distort our domestic life, the further we go in anti-terror measures, the more we do our enemies' work. For instance, the nation's capital has been turned into a bunker city. Visiting citizens can barely approach the White House or the Capitol. The damage on 9/11 was al-Qaeda's doing; much of the damage to normal life since then has been our choice.

"Who are the victims of terrorism?", Benjamin Friedman, a graduate student in political science at MIT, asked in the MIT publication Breakthroughs last year. "Those that the terrorists kill or maim and those that fear terrorism. Terrorism takes its name not from violence but from the emotion violence provokes. Terrorists are the enemy. So is fear … If we are all afraid of terrorism, we are all its victims. In the war on terror, policies that encourage fear are a self-inflicted wound."

Unfortunately, almost nothing about the Department of Homeland Security suggests either a willingness to distinguish large risks from small ones or a concern about needlessly generating fear. In part this reflects the department's origins as a mishmash of pre-existing groups. In the best of circumstances it would take a long time to make the Secret Service, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Coast Guard, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and many others behave as if they were part of the same organization. Even coordinating data systems has been a major challenge.

Still, that doesn't explain the department's policies, which have illustrated what Friedman calls the "democratization of risk," a term he does not mean as praise. By acting as if everyone poses an equal threat or is in equal danger—all passengers asked for their IDs, all motorists told by flashing signs to "report suspicious activity," all citizens told that the national alert level has gone from "elevated" to "high"—the department avoids making choices about which risks are most important. Since the DHS went into business, in 2002, news reports have chronicled a stream of pointless-seeming grants: half a million dollars to the town of North Pole, Alaska, for "homeland security rescue and communications equipment" to serve the town's 1,570 residents; $1.5 million to Grand Forks County, in North Dakota, for disaster-response equipment.

This past fall Veronique de Rugy, of the American Enterprise Institute, released a detailed assessment of where the money had gone. It noted that in 2003 Congress authorized the DHS to distribute $100 million in preparedness grants to the seven cities seen as facing the most serious threat: New York, Washington, Los Angeles, Seattle, Chicago, San Francisco, and Houston. This was a deliberately chosen list, because of the targets and vulnerabilities in each city. At about the same time, the Insurance Services Office, a private organization that assesses risks for insurers, came up with a very similar list of nine cities where the risk of attack (or "loss," from the insurers' standpoint) was worst. The two cities it added were Philadelphia and Boston.

The problems showed themselves within a year of the original congressional directive, when the list of "critical" cities ballooned to fifty, including Fresno, St. Paul, and Baton Rouge. A DHS spokesman has contended, in comments to The Washington Post, that "better intelligence and more sophisticated analysis led to the increase in jurisdictions eligible for this funding." Maybe. Government and press reports have shown that most of the grants are either misdirected—cities putting the money toward their normal fire and police bills—or actively foolish, enticing every village to create a superfluous hazmat team. State-by-state homeland-security funding demonstrates the same failure to discriminate. The main problem is precisely that funding is state by state. When authorizing
homeland-security funds Congress mandated that 40 percent of all the money be divided equally among the states, regardless of population or threat level. New York and Idaho each get the same cut of this money, as do California and Delaware. Overall, according to Veronique de Rugy's calculations, Wyoming has received $35.30 per capita in homeland-security grants and North Dakota $28.70, versus $4.70 for California and $5.10 for New York.

Nothing about this is considered and serious. "U.S. Homeland Security policy has embraced the false idea that all American communities are likely targets of terrorism," Benjamin Friedman wrote. "It is time to stop indulging the expensive myth that risks are geographically distributed, time to abandon feel-good security, and time to accept reality: some risk is inevitable, some of us should be more afraid than others, but our fear is what our enemies intend."

If the United States decided to worry about terrorism only when that worry was immediately useful, and to accept smaller risks as the price of avoiding large ones, what would it do then? It could start by turning off the Big Brother—esque "suspicious activity" highway signs and eliminating the nationwide color-coded alert system. If there is a threat to Chicago or San Antonio that the people in that city should know about, tell them. There is no reason to have the "crawl" at the bottom of the Fox News screen flash "Terror Alert: High" to viewers in Seattle and Miami. Send most of the airport-security personnel home—and while we're at it, eliminate the sixty-mile-wide "no fly" circle that surrounds Air Force One wherever the president happens to be, disrupting airliners and all other air traffic.

We could also eliminate the ID checks at parking garages and the sign-in sheets at office buildings that many private firms have instituted to seem "secure." Each time I'm forced to sign one of these sheets, I look at the previous few pages. Usually someone has had the bravado to sign in as "Jack D. Ripper" or "Mullah Omar." The government could also start issuing visas at something like the pre-9/11 level. The drastic cutback in visas has reduced the flow of foreign students to American universities and of skilled foreign workers to American industries, while it may or may not have done anything to reduce the flow of future terrorists. Illegal crossings of our northern and southern borders are way up, as the legal flow has ebbed; these informal pathways will presumably be future terrorists' routes. Kenneth Rogoff, an economist at Harvard, wrote recently that the United States "will likely register slower economic growth in a few years due to post-9/11 visa restrictions alone."

In a less panicky mood America could apply a number of the recommendations that come up repeatedly in discussions with homeland-security experts. The essential concepts are these:

The country should undertake a systematic vulnerability study, something a number of states and industries have done piecemeal. The federal government has shirked an overall effort, in part because it would lead to awkward questions about why the money now goes where it does.

The country should prevent attacks where it can; but everywhere else it should concentrate on rebound capacity, so that when defenses break down, as they inevitably will, the damage can be contained. Improved public-health services are near the top of most "rebound" lists. They would be indispensable in any future biological attack, and helpful in all other circumstances.

Repairs to the nation's physical infrastructure, especially to its already shaky electrical power grid, are next on the priority list. And the country should recognize that certain potential targets—chemical plants in particular—are in private rather than public hands. The federal government now assumes that market forces will lead those industries to make the appropriate investments in security. But as Daniel Prieto points out, that assumption is unrealistic; as with pollution control, no company will want to go first unless it knows its competitors will have to follow.

Soldiers, police officers, and firefighters take risks to defend things we value. Our leaders explain the purpose of their sacrifice. They should also explain the importance of citizens' facing risks in order to preserve normal civic life.

The War of Ideas

No principle of warfare is more familiar than the maxim "Know your enemy." No concept has been more thoroughly ignored by the United States in its efforts to eliminate the root causes of Islamic terrorism since 9/11.

An amazing lack of interest in how life looks to those we are trying to persuade, deter, or capture accounts for many of America's difficulties in the past three years. People in the anti-terrorism business talk about our need to wage a decades-long struggle for the future of Islam, in which the United States has a vital stake. But consider the mini war of ideas we have already fought. America's approach to the Muslim world since 9/11 has made sense—to the Americans who designed it. First we would rout the Taliban from Afghanistan and deny al-Qaeda the sanctuaries and training camps that were important to its growth through the 1990s. Then we would take the war to Iraq, solving the immediate problem of Saddam Hussein and whatever weapons he had, and fostering a long-run example of a prosperous, democratic Arab-Islamic state. We would talk about freedom, and our actions would speak even louder; by
the burdens we had borne we would show how deeply we cared. Meanwhile, we could leave our policy toward the Palestinians and the Israelis unchanged, on the assumption that it would be easier to push forward after Iraq was stabilized. And as a side benefit, we wouldn't have to worry about energy conservation or alternative fuels, because a peaceful Persian Gulf would be a bountiful supplier.

That was the intention. Somehow the results looked different to the people this strategy was supposed to influence. On this point one need not rely on the word of those who argued that the war in Iraq would undermine the war against terrorism by motivating more people to attack us: Richard Clarke; Michael Scheuer, the former head of the CIA's anti—bin Laden unit; General Anthony Zinni, the former CENTCOM commander; and others. One need not rely on the final report of the 9/11 Commission, about the mounting difficulty of winning hearts and minds among Muslims, or on studies from the Pew Global Attitudes Project showing that in Pakistan—a crucial American ally in the anti-terror effort—Osama bin Laden's "favorable" rating climbed to 67 percent after the invasion of Iraq, and George Bush's fell to seven percent.

Instead one can turn to the Pentagon's own Defense Science Board, which submitted a 102-page internal report in November about how America was doing in the global war of ideas. The report was not classified, but its existence was kept quiet until after the election. The New York Times was the first to mention its findings, in late November. The report, now on the Federation of American Scientists' Web site, argues that America utterly failed in its post-9/11 "strategic communications" efforts with the Muslim world. The information campaign—or as some still would have it, "the war of ideas," or the struggle for "hearts and minds"—is important to every war effort. In this war it is an essential objective, because the larger goals of U.S. strategy depend on separating the vast majority of non-violent Muslims from the radical-militant Islamist-Jihadists. But American efforts have not only failed in this respect: they may also have achieved the opposite of what they intended.

In itemizing the list of problems the DSB placed its greatest stress on the federal government's failure of imagination. The United States knew that its intentions were good in removing Saddam Hussein from power and, later, in forcibly pacifying large parts of Iraq. Unfortunately, the Arabs and Muslims didn't see it that way. "In the eyes of Muslims, American occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq has not led to democracy there, but only more chaos and suffering," the DSB reported (italics in original). So, too, with other components of long-term U.S. strategy. Were we helping bring freedom to a troubled region? "Saying that 'freedom is the future of the Middle East' is seen as patronizing, suggesting that Arabs are like the enslaved peoples of the old Communist World—but Muslims do not feel this way: they feel oppressed, but not enslaved." Moreover, according to the DSB report, America misread the Muslims' real concerns. "Muslims do not 'hate our freedom,'" the DSB said, "but rather, they hate our policies. The overwhelming majority voice their objections to what they see as one-sided support in favor of Israel and against Palestinian rights, and the longstanding, even increasing support for what Muslims collectively see as tyrannies, most notably Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Pakistan, and the Gulf states." All in all, from the perspective of the people whose minds we hoped to change, "the dramatic narrative since 9/11 has essentially borne out the entire radical Islamist bill of particulars." When Osama bin Laden and his counterparts want to say "America is even worse than you think!" all they need to do is point to the news.

What would a better approach look like—one based on how a Muslim audience would react? This is not the place to belabor the consequences of America's presence in Iraq. Obviously it complicates the effort to win Islamic sympathy, but it is a reality for now and will be for several years. Also, we can assume that military and police actions against specific terrorist units must continue. These can become more effective than they have been so far. The Sling and the Stone, by Marine Corps Colonel Thomas Hammes, and Tactics of the Crescent Moon: Militant Muslim Combat Methods, by H. John Poole, a Marine combat veteran of Vietnam, are two of several recent books offering new counterinsurgent strategies.

But an improved military approach, while necessary, is sufficient neither to protect American territory nor to project American values in the right way. For both tasks the United States needs to come to a clearer understanding of the movement it is fighting and of the Islamic public that will either shelter terrorists or impede them. Fortunately, this is where the academic action is. Seemingly every day there is a conference somewhere in the world on the social, religious, economic, and geographic sources of terrorist movements, or on the titanic struggle between modernizing and radicalizing forces within Islam. Before me are proceedings from recent conferences on such topics in Paris, Jerusalem, and Oslo. This past fall in Washington, Brian Jenkins and his colleagues from RAND unveiled a project that attempted to model recent events through the eyes of al-Qaeda—where it had been successful, what it feared. Fighting terrorism and understanding Islam is as fertile a field as Soviet studies were during the Cold War.

Through these studies runs the idea that the United States could make an authentic and appealing case to the Muslim world—if it took the time to understand which parts of its argument are most likely to register with the person in the street. For instance, in much of today's Muslim world "justice" is a more compelling ideal than individual "liberty." "This really is a war of narratives in a battlefield of interpretation," Marc Sageman says. "We need to promote a positive vision to substitute for the vision of violence. And that vision has to be justice. It is no accident that these groups are always calling themselves 'The Party of Justice' and so on. In the time of the Suez Canal the United States stood for 'justice' against the Brits and French, and we were the toast of the Middle East. We need to be pushing a vision of a fair and just world, with us in harmony with the rest of the world, as opposed to at war with the rest of the world."

The New York Times
Why has America had a harder time lately pushing its vision of justice? The two major obstacles are its need for foreign oil, which forces it to coddle regimes it would otherwise blast as anti-democratic, and its failure even to feign interest in the Palestinians' hardships in their dispute with Israel. The need for oil drenches America in hypocrisy, and America's distance from the Palestinians is a barrier to even being heard in Arab discussions. There are sufficient economic and environmental reasons for the United States to work hard for a different energy strategy, and there are sufficient humanitarian and historical reasons for it to intensify pressure on both sides to comply with a land-for-peace deal. Such steps would also be part of the war of ideas, in helping America seem more a force for justice.

The United States could also find ways to signal involvement with and sympathy for Muslim societies. "U.S. officials have refused to appear on al-Jazeera," says Steven Miller, the director of international security programs at the Belfer Center. "That's nuts! Yes, al-Jazeera is often a vitriol machine. But you have to engage it, or Arab publics hear nothing but the vitriol. For the same reason, if I were George Bush, I wouldn't let a month go by without having some Arab leader in Crawford for a barbecue." Brian Jenkins says that every day the United States should stress the harm terrorists are doing to their fellow Muslims. "Our leaders typically issue horrified statements about the consequence of a bio-terror attack for Americans," he says. "Instead we should talk about the devastating impact it will have for the world—one fifth of which is Muslim. Despite the shortcomings in our public-health system, America will get through it. But a contagious disease, in today's circumstances? When it gets to Karachi or Cairo, it is going to produce a slaughter. We may underestimate our ability to wage this kind of political warfare." Stephen Van Evera, a member of the MIT Security Studies Program, says, "Public diplomacy—propaganda, if you will—should play a large role. But our efforts are halfhearted. Where are the coffee-table books about the atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein? Where are the oral histories and documentaries?" Public diplomacy is not a scientific or predictable process. After the Soviet Union fell, some members of formerly communist states said that jazz broadcasts on Radio Free Europe had attracted them; others listened to the news; others were inspired by speeches by John Kennedy or Ronald Reagan—or by Playboy magazine. As dictatorships fell in South America, some people resented the United States for having propped up their former leaders; others respected the human-rights policy Jimmy Carter had emphasized; others just wanted to get to Houston for a job. We have no way of knowing exactly which of America's efforts or America's images will prove influential. But the lesson of the Cold War is that we should use every tool we have.

Visa policy has an impact on public diplomacy. "I want a flood of young Muslims studying here," Miller says. "Let's set up a King Hussein scholarship program, like the Fulbright scholars. Not every foreign student ends up loving or even liking this country, but on the whole, those who have lived here will have a much harder time demonizing America and Americans."

**LOOSE NUKEs: DO THIS FIRST**

Twice when I was interviewing authorities for this article, I heard a phrase that made me stop to be sure I had caught the words correctly. Once was when I was speaking with Stephen Van Evera, in his office at MIT. The other time was when I was speaking with Steven Miller, at Harvard. The words Van Evera used were "the worst failure of government in modern times." Miller's were only slightly different: "the single largest public-policy failure in recent memory." They were referring to the same fact: that thirteen years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States was in no apparent hurry to be sure that the 30,000 nuclear warheads in the Soviet arsenal had been safely locked away.

Homeland security is at the moment largely a waste of money. The war of ideas is a battle we have not seriously begun to fight. The loose-nukes problem is different: it is the one aspect of the terrorist threat that could kill large numbers of us. And it is the problem whose outcome is most clearly within America's power to control. If the United States acts quickly enough, it can reduce essentially to zero the chance that one of its cities will be vaporized. If it is too slow, it will raise that chance to a near certainty.

During the Clinton years Graham Allison, then an assistant secretary of defense, prepared a classified list called "A Hundred Horribles." It itemized scenarios in which terrorists could inflict disruption, destruction, and death on the United States, and ranked them according to potential harm. A 9/11-style episode, in which a hijacked airplane was crashed into a "trophy building," was on the list—in the bottom half. "Number one on everyone's list was the nuclear detonation in a city," Allison told me recently. "That's the only way you can kill hundreds of thousands of people in an instant."

The fearsome power of nuclear weapons is so familiar as to have become banal. Yet a diminished sense of nuclear peril creates a political problem: the temptation to forget how different this peril is from hijackings, suicide bombings, hostage murders, and nearly anything else that terrorists do. That is why Van Evera and Miller used the phrases they did. It is also why Howard Baker, a former Republican Senate majority leader, and Lloyd Cutler, a former Democratic White House counsel, said in a January 2001 report that "the most urgent unmet national security threat to the United States today is the danger that weapons of mass destruction or weapons-useable material in Russia could be stolen and sold to terrorists or hostile nation-states and used against American troops abroad or citizens at home." In 2002 Osama bin Laden issued a fatwa authorizing the killing of up to four million Americans and specifying that half of them should be children. This he had calculated as a proportionate response to the number of Arabs killed by U.S. and Israeli actions. The only way to kill on this scale would be with a nuclear warhead.
How would the terrorists get the bomb? The easiest way would be to buy one smuggled from the Soviet arsenal. "Since the accounting system in the USSR was so bad, you just don't know what went missing" in the turbulent years following the Soviet collapse, says Matthew Bunn, of the Belfer Center's Project on Managing the Atom. "I would say there's stuff that got stolen that we don't know about, because there is stuff that got stolen we do know about." Bunn said that the cultural aftereffects of the long Soviet years have probably kept the materials safer than they would otherwise be. "You couldn't talk to a foreigner without being watched," he said. "They were coming out of decades of life with a closed society and closed borders. Plus, they had this amazing patriotism and devotion to duty of people who were working the Russian nuclear systems. If you had put an equivalent number of Americans under equivalent circumstances for an equivalent period of time, there'd have been more theft." And if no warheads are available ready-made? Then technicians for the terrorist groups will need to make their own—which is no longer such a technical challenge. The basic design concepts, closely guarded thirty years ago, are now discussed in high school physics classes. As I write, I have on my screen a how-to diagram for a simple bomb from the Web site of Georgia State University.

The good news is that nuclear terrorism could conceivably be prevented, and the strategy for preventing it is utterly straightforward. It is based on one crucial difference between the nuclear threat and all other forms of terrorism: not that the weapons are so much more destructive but that they are so much harder to obtain. If terrorists cannot get the material—highly enriched uranium, plutonium, or existing bombs—from the limited number of countries that produce them, the problem goes away. For the moment, no finished bomb or fissile material is known to have entered the hands of terrorist groups. The highest priority for national defense is ensuring that this remains so. The single worst threat to America's future, then, has the clearest solution. The best-known plans have three big themes in common: a drastic emergency campaign to bring Soviet "loose nukes" under control, which mainly means money to hire former Soviet scientists for the task; rigid supervision of all existing fissile material, which, as Ashton Carter, an assistant secretary of defense in the Clinton administration, has put it, should be locked up and treated "as if it were already a bomb"; and diplomatic, economic, and (when necessary) military measures to keep any new fissile material from being produced.

The gulf between any of these urgent, commonsense plans and existing U.S. policy is enormous. No one thinks the Clinton administration was spending enough on the "cooperative threat-reduction" program for controlling the former Soviet arsenal. The Bush administration is spending less. Including costs for Iraq, total defense spending next year will approach $500 billion, and defense against terrorism is its highest stated priority. Of that $500 billion a tiny fraction will be devoted to all forms of nuclear-material control: about $1 billion. Years from now, if an American city is devastated by a "small" Hiroshima-scale explosion, everyone will ask, "How could this have happened?" The answer will be "Because we let it." We didn't bother to control the "loose nukes" when that was still possible.

Another tool for discouraging the spread of nuclear weapons is the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Under it the existing nuclear powers enjoy a permanent, "unfair" advantage over the non-nuclear states. In exchange they are supposed to pledge never to use nuclear weapons against a state that doesn't have them, and to reduce their own nuclear arsenals over time. Current U.S. policy creates problems in two ways: the "pre-emptive war" doctrine, ultimately backed by nuclear weapons, extends to Iran, which has signed the treaty; and the Bush administration has proposed developing several new nuclear weapons, including the "robust nuclear earth penetrator," a superstrength bunker-buster. (Just after the election the House voted against further funding for this giant new bomb, with a number of Republicans saying it was unnecessary.)

Suppose the United States viewed the loose-nukes project as the equivalent of the race to the moon in the 1960s, or the search for a polio cure in the 1950s. Suppose it had to succeed, and as fast as possible. What might that cost? According to Graham Allison, the total might be as high as $30 billion over three years. America now spends that much every six months in Iraq. It spent more than that during the first term of the Bush administration on a missile-defense plan that, even if it worked perfectly, would not do any good for another ten years. By then even one loose nuke could make all other plans moot. This is the place to start.

In 1949 everything changed for America when the Soviet Union tested its first atomic bomb. By that time U.S. political leaders had already developed concepts to govern a very long struggle against Soviet communism. Harry Truman, George Kennan, George Marshall, and their colleagues are heroes now because what they explained to the public through the late 1940s and early 1950s proved to be so wise. Could today's leaders look like heroes in fifty years? Yes—if they similarly laid the groundwork for a long, principled, and sustainable struggle. A Truman would tell us that loose nuclear weapons are the real emergency of this moment, and that instead of pussyfooting around we should control them right away. A Kennan would explain the sources of Muslim extremist behavior and how our actions could encourage or retard it. A Marshall would point out how gravely we left ourselves exposed through our reliance on oil from the Persian Gulf.

And the Harry Truman who strolled on Washington sidewalks even after assassins tried to shoot him could explain something else: that a courageous, confident, open society is a goal in itself. When we face dangers on our own, character, faith, and family make us brave. When we face them collectively, political leadership does—or does not.
Success and failure. Victory and defeat. American culture places an extremely high premium on success, and firmly equates it with winning. In politics, sports, business, and the courtroom, we have a passion to win and are terrified of losing. Success Without Victory explores the political, social, and psychological contexts behind the cases themselves, as well as the eras from which they originated and the eras they subsequently influenced. SUBSCRIBE TODAY! Full access to this book and over 83,000 more. It must be a peace without victory. Victory would mean peace forced upon the loser, a victor's terms imposed upon the vanquished. W. Willson. 22th January... I'll post more as I play (that is if I keep playing life's busy too). Edit: 6. forgot to post it. At the start of war the only Victory Point controlled by Serbia is Belgrade right in the front-line. First retreat and they got annexed. Didn't feel right at all as historically they put up quite a fight. Winners and losers. Success and failure. Victory and defeat. American culture places an extremely high premium on success, and firmly equates it with winning. In politics, sports, business, and the courtroom, we have a passion to win and are terrified of losing. Instead of viewing success and failure through such a rigid lens, Jules Lobel suggests that we move past the winner-take-all model and learn valuable lessons from legal and political activists who have advocated causes destined to lose in court but have had important