CHAPTER 2

The Long War of the 21st Century*

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Eliot Cohen is the distinguished professor at Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies. He argues that we are in World War IV. The Cold War was World War III. I think Eliot's formulation fits the circumstances much better than describing this as a war on terrorism.

Let me say a few words about who our enemy is in World War IV, why they're at war with us, why we are now at war with them, and how we have to think about fighting it both at home and abroad.

Who is the enemy? There are at least three movements, all coming out of the Middle East, who have been at war with us for years. The first is the Islamist movement of Shi'a Muslims led by the ruling clerics, the Mullahs of Iran who seized our embassy personnel in Tehran in 1979. They are a minority of the Iranian Shi'ite clerics but they constitute the ruling force in Iran; they back Hezbollah, and they have been at war with us for nearly a quarter of a century. They blew up our embassy and our Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983.

The second group is the fascists. I use that word literally, not as an expletive. The Ba'athist parties of Iraq and Syria are essentially fascist parties, modeled after the fascism parties of the '30s. They're totalitarian and they are anti-Semitic.

Saddam and the Ba'athists in Iraq have been at war with us for over a decade. For them, the Gulf War never stopped. To underscore the point, Saddam tried to assassinate former President George Bush in 1993 in

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Kuwait. Saddam and the Ba'athists have ties and associations with varying terrorist organizations, including al-Qaeda.

The third group, and the one that caused us to realize that the War was continuous, is the Islamist movement of Sunni Muslims. This is probably the most virulent and long-lasting of the three groups that are at war with us. The Wahhabis, the religious movement in Saudi Arabia dating back to the 18th century, were joined in the '50s and '60s by immigration into Saudi Arabia by fundamentalist Islamists, or a more modern stripe of essentially the same ideology, many of its followers coming from Egypt. Groups of this sort were focused on attacking what they call "the near enemy," the Mubarak regime in Egypt, and to some extent, the Saudi royal family. The attack in 1979 on the great mosque in Mecca is an example of their actions. Around 1995, they decided to turn their concentration and effort against what they call "the Crusaders and the Jews" - U.S. And they have been at war with us ever since, as evidenced by several well-known terrorist incidents, including the attack on a reserve facility in Saudi Arabia that killed Americans, the East African Embassy bombings, the attack on the U.S.S. Cole, and, of course, September 11th.

I think of these three groups as analogous to different mafia families. They hate each other, they kill each other from time to time, but outsiders fare a lot worse and each group is willing and capable to assist another to get what they want.

There are two basic reasons why they went to war against us. The first, and the underlying one, was best expressed to me last year by a D.C. cab driver. Now, I resolutely refuse to read any public opinion polls. When I want to know what people think, I talk to cab drivers. This is both more enjoyable and in many ways offers a better finger on the pulse of the nation than any poll. I got into a cab last January, the day after former President Clinton gave a speech at Georgetown University in which he implied that one reason we were attacked on September 11th was because of American slavery before 1865 and because of our treatment of the American Indian.

The cab driver was an older, black American, a long-term resident of D.C., a guy about my age. The Washington Times was open in the front seat to the story of the President's speech. I noticed it and said, "Did you read that piece about President Clinton's speech yesterday?" He said yes,

and I asked him what he thought about it. He said, "These people don't hate us for what we've done *wrong*. They hate us for what we do *right*."

I can't express it better than that. We're hated because of freedom of speech, because of freedom of religion, because of our economic freedom, because of our equal treatment of women, because of all the good things that we do. This is like the war against Nazism. We are hated because of the best of what we are.

But even if we're hated, why are we attacked? Well, I would suggest that we have been essentially hanging a "Kick Me" sign on our back in the Middle East for the past quarter century. We have given substantial evidence of being what bin Laden has called a paper tiger.

My friend Tom Moorer, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was a young naval officer in World War II. Just after the war he participated in the interrogations of Prince Konoye and several of the handful of Japanese leaders who were eventually hanged after war crimes trials. Moorer's interrogation team asked each of the prisoners why they did it. "Why did you attack us at Pearl Harbor?" They said, essentially, "We looked at what you were doing in the '20s and '30s. You were disarming militarily. You wouldn't fortify Wake Island. You wouldn't fortify Guam. Your army had to drill with wooden rifles. So, we attacked because we thought we would win. We had no idea that your rich, spoiled, feckless country would fight back as you did after December 7, 1941. You stunned us, and you beat us."

Flash forward some six decades. I think we offered a lot of evidence to Saddam and to the Islamist Shi'a in Tehran and Hezbollah and to the Islamist Sunni that we were, essentially, a rich, spoiled, feckless country that wouldn't fight. In 1979, they took our people hostage in Iran and what did we do? We tied yellow ribbons around trees and launched a failed effort to rescue them. In 1983, they blew up our embassy and our marine barracks in Beirut. What did we do? We walked away, just as we did in Mogadishu in 1993 when they shot our helicopters down.

Throughout much of the 1980's, many other terrorist acts were committed against us. What was our response to vicious attacks against the U.S.? We arrested a few small fry and then prosecuted them. We litigated. The one honorable exception was President Ronald Reagan's air strike against Libya in retaliation for a terrorist bombing.

In 1991, President Bush organized a magnificent coalition to reverse the seizure of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein. We fought the war superbly, and then stopped it while Saddam's Republican Guard was intact. Then, after having encouraged the Kurds and the Shi'a to rebel against Saddam, we stood back, left the bridges intact, left their elite units intact, let them fly armed and troop-carrying helicopters around, and watched the Kurds and Shi'a, who were winning in 15 of Iraq's 18 provinces, be massacred. You didn't read much about that in the press because the media didn't pay much attention. But those who knew about this said: Well, we know what the Americans value. They save their oil in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and after that, they don't care.

Then in 1993, Saddam tried to assassinate former President Bush in Kuwait with a bomb. How did we respond? President Clinton fired a couple of dozen cruise missiles into an empty building in the middle of the night in Baghdad, retaliating quite effectively against a handful of Iraqi cleaning women and night watchmen, but not against Saddam Hussein.

Then came the attack of September 11th and President Bush's response. Our military action in Afghanistan, like our response against the Japanese after Pearl Harbor, was something that came as a great surprise to those enemies in the Middle East who attacked us. Like the Japanese in 1941, the Islamist fascists thought that what they believed was a spoiled, feckless country would not fight.

How must we fight? At home, the war is going to be difficult in two ways. Our first problem is how to deal with the lack of resilience in the infrastructure that serves our wonderful and technologically sophisticated country. Our society is comprised of hundreds of complex networks: food processing and delivery, the internet, financial transfers, the electricity grid, oil and gas pipelines, etc. None of these was put together with any thought to making them resilient against terrorism. All are open and relatively easy to access. Their vulnerable and dangerous points are highlighted for maintenance or safety, or environmental reasons. We advertise "Transformer Here," "Hazardous Chemicals Here," "Cable Crossing Here." Before September 11, we didn't worry about this openness. After all, we experienced extremely destructive intentional violence against the major civilian infrastructure in North America only twice in our history, that I can think of: Sherman's burning of Atlanta in 1864 and the British burning of Washington in 1814.

Virtually all of our infrastructure has been put together with this spirit of transparency and ease of access.

About seven years ago, one of our communication satellites had a computer chip fail. The satellite lost its attitude control. Immediately about 90% of the pagers in the country went down. The next day they were back up again because somebody had figured out how to reroute them to a different satellite. That's the kind of random failure we cope with easily. But that's not what happened a year ago September 11th.

In the preparations for the attack of September 11th, a group of intelligent and very evil terrorists said to themselves, something like: "When the foolish Americans do baggage searches at airports they ignore short knives like box cutters. Short knives can slit throats just as easily as long knives. This is good. The stupid Americans treat all airplane hijackings as if they will land safely and passengers will only be inconvenienced for a few hours. The U.S. government tells pilots and aircrews and everyone aboard to be polite and passive to hijackers. This is very good for us. And, even though about twice a year there have been crazy people who successfully get into the cockpits of civilian airliners, and passengers and crew write to the FAA and say, 'you ought to do something about this', the airlines continue to have flimsy cockpit doors on their airliners. Let's see: short knives permitted, be polite to hijackers, flimsy cockpit doors. That means we can easily take over airliners, fly them into buildings, and kill thousands of them."

Einstein used to say, "God may be sophisticated, but He's not plain mean." What Einstein meant (since for him nature and God were pretty much the same thing) was that if you're playing against nature and trying to discover a new principle of physics, it may be a tough problem, but there's nobody trying to outwit you and make it harder. In war and terrorism there is always someone who is not only trying to make it harder, but is trying to kill you.

We have developed just-in-time delivery to hold down inventories and operating costs; great, until somebody puts a dirty bomb in one of the 50,000 containers that cross U.S. borders every day and we decide that U.S. customs has to start inspecting virtually all of the containers at ports, instead of the 2% that are inspected now. Then all of that just-in-time manufacturing comes to a halt. Full hospitals? Great idea, it keeps hospital and health care costs down and moves people through hospitals

rapidly, keeping them at close to 100% occupancy. This works until there's a bioterrorist attack and thousands, or hundreds of thousands, or millions of Americans need emergency health care and there are no empty beds.

Our nation's networks all have significant weak points. Many of them operate according to incentives established to promote efficiency or for other purposes that make them more vulnerable to terrorism. We must carefully examine our infrastructure and find those vulnerabilities that are the functional equivalents of flimsy cockpit doors and get them fixed. We are going to have to pull the relevant decision-makers together and examine potential weak points like electricity grids, oil and gas pipelines, and container ports, and figure out ways to change the incentives so that we build in resilience of a kind that is compatible with a market economy.

We have to fight successfully in the United States against terrorist cells and organizations that support terrorism and we have to deal with the difficult fact that some of these groups are religiously rooted in one aspect of Islam. We must understand that the vast majority of American Muslims are not terrorists and are not sympathetic to terrorists. But there are institutions and individuals in America, some of them with a great deal money, that encourage and support the hatred that underpins terrorism.

In dealing with this problem, however, we have to both remember that Americans are creatures of Madison's Constitution and his Bill of Rights and at the same time we must be aware that we are at war here in our country, now.

This poses very hard choices. My personal judgment is that none of the decisions so far made by the Administration go beyond what is Constitutionally acceptable in taking strong action domestically against terrorism. The Supreme Court has historically been extremely tolerant of the Executive, and even more tolerant of the Executive and Congress acting together, in times of severe crisis and war. In the Civil War, Lincoln suspended habeas corpus. In World War II, we had Japanese internment camps in the western part of the country. In World War I, there was some very draconian legislation, also upheld by the Supreme Court. Nothing that has been done so far by this Administration, of course, even remotely approaches any of those steps, and it should not. We have to be alert to this. We do not want our children and grandchildren to look back on decisions that were as drastic as the

incarceration of the ethnic Japanese in World War II and say, "how in the world could those people have done that?" Any country is capable of poor judgment when it becomes frightened.

In the war against terrorism abroad, the most interesting situation right now exists with the Islamist Shi'a, the ruling mullahs of Iran. This small minority of Iranian Shi'ite mullahs control the state's instruments of power. They are effectively in the same position that the leaders of the Kremlin were in 1988 or the rulers in Versailles in 1788: namely, the storm isn't quite overhead, but if they look at the horizon they can see it gathering in the distance. The mullahs have great power still. They have oil money and the military, but I think there are some tectonic shifts below the surface in Iran.

The mullahs have lost the students. They have lost the women. They have lost the brave newspaper editors and professors who are in prison, some under sentence of death and being tortured. They are losing the Ayatollahs, one by one. Ayatollah Montazeri, a very brave man, has been issuing fatwas against suicide killings and has been under house arrest for five years. Early this past summer, Ayatollah Taheri, formerly a hard line supporter of the mullahs in the City of Isfahan, issued a blast against them saying that what they were doing by supporting torture and supporting terrorism was fundamentally at odds with the tenets of Islam. There are increasing student demonstrations and the Iranians are having so much trouble keeping the students down, they are importing thugs from Syria to suppress demonstrations.

I think President Bush did exactly the right thing in the early part of the summer, when after the student demonstrations surrounding Taheri's blast, he issued a statement saying that the United States was on the side of the students, not the mullahs. This drove the mullahs crazy-evidence of the shrewdness and wisdom of the President's words.

The Islamist Sunni, al-Qaeda and their fellow travelers are going to be the hardest for America to deal with. They are fueled by oil money from the Gulf, Saudi Arabia principally. They are wealthy in and of themselves. They are present in some 60 countries and they loathe us, like the Wahhabis, who are their first cousins. They are fanatically anti-Western, anti-modern, anti-Christian, anti-Jewish, and anti-most-Muslims. If you want to get a feel for the intellectual infrastructure of this Wahhabi-Islamist movement there are websites where one can go to pull in the

sermons on any given Friday throughout Saudi Arabia. I looked at translations of one such set of sermons two or three weeks ago before some discussions we were having in the Defense Policy Board. The three main themes that week were: (1) that all Jews are pigs and monkeys; (2) that all Christians and Jews are the enemy and it is our obligation to hate them and destroy them; and (3) that women in the United States routinely commit incest with their fathers and brothers and this is an ordinary and accepted thing in the United States. This is the routine Wahhabi view.

One Wahhabi cleric was interviewed by an American reporter a few weeks ago in Saudi Arabia. The reporter asked him, "Tell me. I'm a Christian. Do you hate me?" And the Wahhabi Cleric said, "Well, of course, if you're a Christian, I hate you. But, I'm not going to kill you." In these circles this is the moderate view.

We need to realize that just as angry German nationalism of the 1920's and 1930's was the soil in which Nazism grew, although not all German nationalists became Nazis. Similiarly, the angry Islamism and Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere today is the soil in which terrorism grows, although not all Islamists or Wahhabis become terrorists.

If you look at the world a little over 85 years ago, in the spring of 1917 when this country entered World War I, there were at most about a dozen existing democracies: the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Britain, France, Switzerland, a few countries in Northern Europe (and almost all of those were only democracies for the male half of their populations). It was a world of empires, of kingdoms, of colonies, and of various types of authoritarian regimes.

Today, 120 out of the 192 countries in the world are democracies. The democratic world is divided between free nations such as the United States, and the other democracies, such as Russia, which are partly free. But there are still 120 countries with parliamentary institutions, contested elections and some elements, at least, of the rule of law. That is an amazing change, literally an order of magnitude change, within the lifetime of many individuals now living.

No dramatic systemic political change like this has ever happened in world history. Needless to say, we have had a lot to do with it. We helped win World War I, we prevailed, along with Britain, in World War II, and we prevailed in the Cold War. Along the way, a lot of people said, very

cynically, "The Germans will never be able to run a democracy; the Japanese will never be able to run a democracy; the Russians will never be able to run a democracy; no nation with a Chinese culture is going to be able to run a democracy." It took some help, but the Germans and the Japanese and now, even the Russians, the Taiwanese, and many other nations and cultures have figured it out. In spite of vast cultural differences, people with backgrounds very different from the Anglo-Saxon world of Westminster and the founding fathers of the United States are on their way to democracy.

In the Muslim world, the 22 Arab states have no democracies. Some reasonably well-governed states are moderating and changing, such as Bahrain and Qatar. But still, there are no democracies among them. There are another 16 Muslim-predominant non-Arab states. Half of these are democracies. They include some of the poorest countries in the world: Bangladesh, Mali. Well over 100 million Muslims live in a democracy in India. Outside of one province, they are generally at peace with their Hindu neighbors.

The problem is not basically Islam. There is a special situation in the Middle East attributable to historical and cultural factors. Outside of Israel and Turkey, the Middle East essentially consists of no democracies. It has, rather, two types of governments — pathological predators and vulnerable autocrats. This is a bad mix. Five of those states: Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan and Libya sponsor and assist terrorism in one way or another; and all five are working on weapons of mass destruction.

The Middle East thus presents a serious and massive complex of problems: all financed by the revenues of two-thirds of the world's oil. I don't believe this terror war is going to go away until we change the face of the Middle East the way we have changed the face of Europe.

I say to the terrorists and the pathological predators such as Saddam Hussein, as well as to the autocrats, the Mubaraks, and the Saudi Royal family. You must realize that now, for the fourth time in 100 years, America has been awakened and our country is on the march. We didn't choose this fight, but we're in it. There's only one way we're going to be able to win. It's the way we won World War I fighting for Wilson's 14 points, the way we won World War II fighting for Churchill's and Roosevelt's Atlantic Charter, and the way we won the cold war or World War III, fighting against the Soviet Union for the noble ideas most

eloquently expressed by President Reagan, and at the beginning by President Truman. We won these wars with our allies because we made it clear that these were not wars of "us against them." They were not wars between countries or civilizations. They were wars of freedom against tyranny.

We have to convince the good people of the Middle East that we are on their side, as we convinced Lech Walesa, and Vaclav Havel, and Andrei Sakharov that we were on their side. This will take time. It will be difficult. For some countries the development of lasting democracy will take many years.