

Evil doers are evil dreaders. --Sixteenth-century proverb

AMERICANS ARE LIVING IN A DREADFUL AGE: OF "SHOE BOMBERS" and orange alerts, of suicide-murderers and poisonous bombs, of pronouncements by our enemies that they will destroy our will as well as our country. We are unaccustomed to living with such dizzying uncertainty. For the first time in history, American citizens feel vulnerable in their own homes to international terrorists determined to hurt them. Innocent civilians are not collateral damage in the terrorists' war, but the preferred target. We are vulnerable where ever we go--at home, at work, on the subway, in shopping malls and football stadiums. The terrorists are not just those coming in from abroad, but they are already here, the government tells us, sleeping in our cities, ready to strike at any moment.

At the same time, there is growing suspicion that the government sees value in making us more afraid and distracting us from foreign policy errors that are making America more hated and Americans less safe. When Attorney General John Ashcroft pronounced, in May 2004, that Americans faced a summer of terror and that that he needed citizens' help in locating terrorist suspects, it was difficult not to wonder why he was suddenly sharing this information. Six out of seven names revealed by Ashcroft had been known to law-enforcement authorities for months or even years. Police departments in the target cities of Los Angeles and New York had not been notified of the new threat and were informed at the same time as the public. Many analysts attributed the threat warning, and its timing, to the Bush administration's desire to refocus public attention away from the continuing strikes by insurgents in Iraq and the crimes of American interrogators and on the broader war on terror (see, for example, Clift, 2004).

Before September 11, we had grown used to complex villains whose wickedness could be explained away by appealing to competing priorities, consequentialist intentions, or cultural norms. The truly wicked had the good sense to practice their evil arts mostly overseas. "Those whose conceptions of evil were always simple and demonic were happy to see them confirmed" by the September 11 attacks, philosopher Susan Nieman tells us. But for those of us whose conceptions of evil had not been shaped by Hollywood but by Vietnam, Cambodia, and Auschwitz, this "single-mindedly thoughtful evil" caught us entirely unprepared (Nieman, 2002: 284-285). The terrorists plotted their attack for years. They may have felt themselves grievously wronged by US policies, Nieman argues, but their victims were not responsible for creating or implementing them. The attackers issued no ultimatum. Many of the victims were not American. Malice and forethought, the classic components of evil intentions, have "rarely been so well combined," Nieman notes (Nieman, 2002: 284-285).

It has long been observed that the things that frighten us most are often quite different from those most likely to harm us. Risk analysts have also observed a tendency for policymakers to respond rapidly to visible crises, even if the baseline rate of danger has not changed. The dynamic encourages reactive "risk of the month" policies crafted in the wake of visible or highly publicized events, resulting in ad hoc policymaking with little regard to competing interests, as John Graham and Jonathan Baert Wiener have found with regard to environmental and health policy (Graham and Wiener, 1995: 234). This tendency may partly be explained by what Anthony Patt and Richard Zeckhauser refer to as "action bias": decision makers' penchant for taking action without necessarily considering long-term effects, coupled with a tendency to choose those actions for which they are likely to receive the most

credit (Patt and Zeckhauser, 2002: 265-302; Graham and Wiener, 1995: 234. "Action is consolatory," Joseph Conrad tells us in *Nostromo*. "It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions."

When dangers evoke a strong sense of dread, policymakers are particularly susceptible to implementing risk-reduction policies with little regard to countervailing dangers (Stern, 2003). We are susceptible to falling back on familiar conceptions of world order, lashing out at the usual suspects in unprovoked wars against yesterday's threats, even as we know that the old threats are no longer as important as the nebulous new ones we do not yet understand. We are especially vulnerable to the lure of lashing out when we face what feels like an apocalyptic threat imposed by an enemy determined utterly to destroy us (Lifton, 2004).

Three days after the terrorist strikes, President George W. Bush announced that his administration would "rid the world of evil" (Bush, 2001). Although experts had been warning about the potential for mass-casualty terrorism for years, and about Al Qaeda's likely involvement in such attacks, terrorism suddenly rose to the top of the national agenda.

WHAT IS MORE FRIGHTENING THAN EVIL? THE WORD ITSELF EVOKES boschian images of the devil and his henchmen, of torture devices, of circles of hell and malevolent, foul-smelling spirits. The hatred our enemies clearly feel for us is dizzyingly dispiriting and frightening. If we see ourselves as fighting evil, rather than a mere threat to national security (among many such threats), we are more willing to make sacrifices. Dread of evil cements societies, Jeremy Bentham observed, more than the hope for good (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974; Slovic, Fischhoff, and Lichtenstein, 1980). The terrorists themselves recognize this dynamic, and they also portray their enemy as "evil" rather than a mere hegemon.

If a leader can persuade us that we are fighting evil itself, we are more likely to make sacrifices, and are more prone to throw caution aside with regard to new risks introduced by our actions. The mission of fighting evil, articulated during the period of maximal pain and confusion in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, made policy remedies that would have been unthinkable only days before the attacks suddenly seem prudent. The administration announced that it would hold suspects in detention indefinitely, without charges and with no access to lawyers. Congress approved new legislation, the USA Patriot Act, in just a few weeks. The act, which the president signed on October 26, 2001, overrides laws in 48 states that had made library records private. It allows searches and seizures without judicial warrant, and prevents Congress from overseeing how the act is implemented.

What makes the situation particularly difficult to assess is that we are facing real threats--terrorists really are determined to kill as many Americans as they can--and real evil, even as we (in my view correctly) suspect that our leaders are manipulating us to feel more afraid.

Terrorism evokes a powerful sense of dread. The radius of fear dwarfs that of injury and death. It is a form of psychological warfare whose goal is to bolster the morale of its supporters and demoralize and frighten its target audience--the victims and their sympathizers. Terrorists aim to make us feel afraid, and to overreact in fear. Judging by the response to September 11, terrorism, in this regard, works.

The media tend to facilitate terrorists' theatrical performances inevitably and often inadvertently. They tend to focus on dramatic events such as tornadoes, fires, drowning, homicides, and accidents. The Environmental Protection Agency observes that people tend to ignore hazards that seem routine, such as indoor air pollution, but fear those that are "high profile," such as hazardous waste sites, which actually pose lower aggregate risks to human health. Terrorist incidents are also high-profile events: They tend to be dramatic and generate media attention (Bentham, 1789: xviii, n.17). (1) Studies show that people tend to exaggerate the likelihood of such events because they are easy to imagine or recall. We feel a gut-level fear of terrorism and are prone to trying to eradicate the risk entirely with little concern for costs. (2)

OUR ARCHENEMY--THE ONE WHO INSPIRED THE PRESIDENT TO RID the world of evil--is hiding in a part of the world invisible even to our high-technology eyes. We cannot see him and cannot reach him. When one seeks to rid the world of evil, however, one quickly finds that evil, alas, is hardly in short supply. For President Bush, Iraq's Saddam Hussein appeared to be an excellent substitute for those responsible for the September 11 strikes.

It would be hard to deny the evil of Saddam Hussein's regime. Saddam was a brutal tyrant responsible for horrific abuses of human rights, both of his own citizens and those of other countries. He repeatedly threatened or attacked neighboring states and violated international laws and treaties. Women who opposed his rule, or whose husbands fought his regime, were beheaded on the street or gang raped. Saddam's henchmen routinely tortured political prisoners, including applying electric shocks to the genitals, fingers, or tongues of their victims; piercing their hands with electric drills; or gouging out eyes ("Saddam Hussein: Crimes and Human Rights Abuses", 2002). He and his sons were unquestionably morally depraved, wicked, and vicious. They intended harm, and were deliberately hurtful--all terms used to define evil in the Oxford English Dictionary. Saddam killed tens of thousands of his own citizens, including an estimated 5,000 in a single day with chemical warfare agents (Senate, 1988). Many of the survivors were maimed for life, and their children, too, would suffer horrific deformities, cancers, and other health problems.

It would also be hard to deny the potential threat imposed by Saddam's regime, at least at one point in its history. While the intelligence that was used by the United States and Britain to justify the war in Iraq appears to have been wrong, it is worth recalling what Iraq told the United Nations about the weapons it possessed in the 1990s. Saddam's "diabolical effort" (Richter, 1997) to expand his arsenal of deadly poisons continued into the next decade. Iraq claimed that it acquired tons of chemical agent, including 3.9 tons of VX, a highly toxic nerve agent, and enough botulinum toxin to wipe out the Earth's population several times over (UNSCOM, 1995: 22-28; Smith, 1997: 1). Iraq admitted that it had produced 19,000 liters of botulinum (10,000 liters weaponized), 8,500 liters of anthrax (6,500 weaponized), 2,200 liters of aflatoxin (1,580 weaponized), and 340 liters of clostridium perfringens (UNSCOM, 1995: 22-28). Aflatoxin, one of several germ agents that Iraq loaded into bombs, is a slow-acting carcinogen with no battlefield utility. UN officials could only speculate about how Iraq might intend to use such an agent--perhaps against its own ethnic minorities, perhaps against Israel, perhaps in terrorist acts in the United States or Europe.

UN inspectors destroyed or witnessed the destruction of part of this arsenal, but by 1997, Saddam began severely to limit the inspectors' access, claiming that his numerous "presidential palaces" should be immune from inspection. UN weapons inspectors announced that they could "no longer verify that Iraq is not making weapons of mass destruction," that they believed that Iraq possessed "the elements of a deadly germ warfare arsenal and perhaps poisonous gases," that they and could not monitor "equipment that could grow seed stocks of biological agents in a matter of hours."

Although the United States viewed the situation as highly dangerous, France and Russia, in particular, no longer viewed Iraq as a significant threat. They proposed lifting sanctions, normalizing relations, and closing the "books" on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan worked out a compromise, but Saddam soon violated its terms. Beginning in December 1998 and continuing for the next four years, not a single UN inspection team visited Iraq. (3)

In September 2002, President Bush announced a new national security strategy of preventive war against rogue states and terrorists. Iraq and North Korea were specifically mentioned. He proclaimed that a reactive posture was no longer tenable, given the nexus between terrorists and rogue states and the possibility they would use weapons of mass destruction. "We cannot let our enemies strike first," he said, but will take "anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States, will, if necessary, act preemptively" (National Security Strategy, 2002: 15). When Bush proposed preventive war against Iraq, America's European allies refused to go along.

America and Europe were in a familiar battle. One side--in this case the United States--proposed applying the "precautionary principle--the ex ante regulation of future risk--to deal with an uncertain and risky threat. This is the position generally favored by Europeans when it comes to environmental and health policy, but generally opposed by the United States. The other side--in this case, Europe--preferred the "reactive posture" that President Bush claimed was no longer tenable with regard to rogue regimes--to wait until Iraq posed a more imminent threat.

The precautionary principle is endorsed in several international agreements, including the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Cartagena Protocol on BioSafety, among others. The set of treaties that established the European Union makes clear that EU environmental policy will be based on the precautionary principle. The United States has taken a different tack on environmental policy. While precautionary regulation was endorsed in several cases, the Supreme Court ruled in 1980 that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) cannot regulate risks on the basis of anticipation of possible dangers but must demonstrate "significant risk" before introducing regulation. (4)

WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE OF THIS DIFFERENCE IN VIEWS REGARDING THE precautionary principle? All regulatory action--whether we propose to rid the world of mosquitoes or rid the world of evil--can have the perverse effect of creating a more dangerous world. Action bias--our tendency to take action in the face of visible threats, without considering countervailing dangers, is as likely to be

harmful as it is to be helpful in a world of multiple threats. Moreover, we have to choose what threats to regulate. The world is indeed a dangerous place, and we cannot regulate away all risks. It is unclear why the Bush administration viewed Iraq in 2003 as a graver danger, for example, than North Korea or other nuclear powers run by unstable regimes.

Precautionary regulations have multiple effects. Banning genetically modified organisms (GMOs), for example, raises the price of grain for poor people, possibly putting them at risk of malnutrition and related diseases. Banning imports of beef from major producers similarly raises the price of meat where the product is banned, but lowers the price that producers receive. Those who implement these policies may also have more than one motivation. They may be seeking an excuse to protect markets from cheaper imports without violating the terms of trade agreements. They may be seeking to make alternatives to the banned products more attractive. Or they may be fighting to improve market share for medical or other countermeasures. It is important when assessing the effects of precautionary policies to consider not only the policy's purported benefits, but also the risks imposed on others.

Precautionary regulation can transfer risks to new populations (the banned product could become more attractive to poor countries as its price drops), substitute new risks for old ones in the same population (increase the risk of hunger in the country banning the product), or transform risks by creating new risks (increase the risk of hunger in countries that neither produce nor ban the products). Assessing the impact of regulatory action requires a holistic assessment. Who benefits from the proposed regulation? Who is harmed? Is the risk transferred or transformed to populations whose governments cannot protect them?

The "regulation" of the Iraq threat introduced countervailing dangers of many kinds, including some that were entirely predictable. By taking action against one threat, without considering the whole portfolio of risks we face--including those likely to be introduced by the very measures put in place to reduce the targeted risk--the net level of danger might decrease, but it might also increase. Risks that appear not to have been carefully assessed include state failure in Iraq, terrorism, weakening of the Western alliance, the creation of a "loose nukes" problem, and possible moral failures introduced when we begin to see ourselves as above the law because we face such extreme dangers.

By attacking Iraq without sufficient preparations for a functioning state, we have created precisely what the Bush administration had identified as a major threat to world security: a weak state unable to police its borders or to maintain a monopoly on violence. Failed and failing states can no longer be viewed exclusively as humanitarian crises, but must be seen as threats to international security because of the opportunities they offer to terrorists. The Bush administration claimed to have learned this lesson from the events of 9/11. The 2002 National Security Strategy declared that the events of that day "taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states. Poverty does not make poor people into terrorists and murderers. Yet poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders." But the decision to attack Iraq, which ignored all efforts by the State Department to create a blueprint for a functioning state, suggests that the lesson was learned only in a theoretical sense.

The false idea that the United States is engaged in a crusade against the Islamic world is a critical component of the Islamist nihilists' worldview, and spreading this idea is critical to their success. The unprovoked attack on Iraq, followed by an occupation that is widely perceived as inept and arbitrary, even by our British ally, has confirmed this view among potential sympathizers. Every time American troops shoot into a crowd, even in self-defense, the image of America as a reckless, ruthless oppressor is highlighted. Televised pictures of American soldiers and their tanks in Iraq are a "deeply humiliating scene to Muslims," explained Saudi dissident Saad al-Faqih, who calls the war in Iraq a "gift" to Osama bin Laden. Unsurprisingly, terrorist recruiters are using the war and the continuing occupation to mobilize recruits--not only inside Iraq but outside as well. Intelligence officials in the United States, Europe, and Africa have reported that the new recruits they are seeing since the war became imminent are younger, with a more menacing attitude.

The occupation has given disparate groups from various countries a common battlefield on which to fight a common enemy. On a website described by the US government as "jihadist," Dr. Hani al-Sibai, the director of the London-based Al-Maqrizi Center for Historical Studies, explains, "When the United States occupied Iraq, the border was actually uncontrolled." Iraq, he says, "is currently a battlefield and a fertile soil for every Islamic movement that views jihad as a priority." He emphasizes that Iraq is a "better place" than Afghanistan for waging jihad "in terms of the language, features of the people, and popular sympathy--whether in Iraq's Sunni regions or its neighboring countries." He notes that "the continuation of the anti-occupation resistance will produce several groups that might later merge into one large group." Very few of the participants in the Iraqi "jihad" are members of Al Qaeda, he says. "Nevertheless, the role of Al Qaeda and its sympathizers in Iraq is more like the salt of the earth and it's reminiscent of the role of Arabs in Afghanistan who lifted the spirit of the Afghan people, who fought and sacrificed thousands of martyrs." He describes a new network of Salafi and other jihadist Sunni groups that formed five months after the occupation began. The network consists of mujahideen, ulema, and political and military experts, he says, together with a number of jihadist factions from the north and south that previously operated separately. He concludes, "Even if the US forces capture all leaders of Al Qaeda or kill them all, the idea of expelling the occupiers and nonbelievers from the Arabian Peninsula and all the countries of Islam will not die."

Even as the war has brought terrorist groups together, it is increasing tensions between the United States and its allies. Poland's president has suggested that he was deceived when his country agreed to participate in the coalition. Immediately upon his election, the prime minister of Spain announced that he would withdraw his country's troops. As the Iranian cleric Hashemi Rafsanjani noted gleefully in a sermon on the first-year anniversary of the attack, "They are getting drifted apart. A gap has appeared in this group which they call a coalition."

In addition to the purported links between Al Qaeda and Saddam, the Bush administration claimed that the war was necessary because of Iraq's weapons-of-mass destruction program. Even granting the Bush administration its arguments, there were still serious problems with their case for invasion. The notion that Saddam might try to cultivate links with Al Qaeda might have been a plausible theory, though no intelligence has been revealed to support it. And yet it seemed more than a bit far-fetched to envisage Saddam giving weapons of mass destruction to an Islamist group with ideological links to local Salafists who aimed to destroy his regime. Indeed, attacking Iraq, without protecting its borders,

has made it more likely that WMD components and expertise would end up in the hands of terrorists. Capt. J. Ryan Cutchin, the leader of the inspection team known as MET Bravo, told the New York Times that his team often arrived at sites identified as housing WMD after looters had stolen everything of value (Miller, 2003). We may never know what the looters--or Baathist elements pretending to be looters--managed to ferret away, he said. Once scientists know how to grow and disseminate biological agents effectively, new stockpiles can be rapidly rebuilt. Perhaps the most frightening prospect would be if some of Saddam's weaponeers provided their expertise to our terrorist enemies.

For the broad-based dystopian movement inspired by Al Qaeda, the new world order--Al Qaeda's term for globalization--is a perfect foil. It is better for the youth of Islam to carry arms and defend their religion with pride and dignity than to submit to the humiliation of globalization, bin Laden's deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, wrote in his putative autobiography. He refers to global institutions such as the United Nations and international relief agencies as tools in the new "crusaders'" arsenal. "In the face of this alliance, a fundamentalist coalition is taking shape," Zawahiri writes, warning that its growth will continue to accelerate. "It is anxious to seek retribution for the blood of the martyrs, the grief of the mothers, the deprivation of the orphans, the suffering of the detainees, and the sores of the tortured people throughout the land of Islam."

The purpose of fighting the new world order, in Zawahiri's view, is to restore the dignity of humiliated youth. This idea is similar to Franz Fanon's notion that violence is a "cleansing force" that flees the oppressed youth from his "inferiority complex, despair and inaction," making him fearless and restoring his self-respect. It is in this context that the war in Iraq, and in particular, the heart-wounding images of American soldiers humiliating, torturing, and killing Iraqi prisoners, become so important. If bin Laden were writing a script for George Bush and Tony Blair to follow, would he not command them to attack and occupy a Muslim country in defiance of the international community and in violation of international law? And would it not be his fondest wish to see the "new crusaders" humiliate those Muslims, and themselves, in the most graphic possible way? Having those soldiers then photograph their crimes might have seemed too much to ask for.

PERHAPS THE MOST TROUBLING SIDE-EFFECT OF THE WAR ON TERRORISM has been the temptation to imagine that the threats we face are so extreme that ordinary moral norms and laws do not apply. In assuming itself to be above the law in many instances, but especially with regard to detaining and interrogating supposed terrorists, the Bush administration has made a serious moral error--one not completely different from the errors made by the terrorists themselves. In interviews with terrorists over the last six years, they have told me that they see themselves as exempt from ordinary moral rules because the population they claim to protect is so abused, and because God is on their side. It is the human condition to be imperfect; to seek to understand the mind of God, but also, tragically and frustratingly, to fail. Talking to religious terrorists has taught me this: when we become moral swaggarts, when we are so certain that God is on our side that we believe ourselves to be beyond the reach of normal moral inquiry or law, we make ourselves vulnerable to the basest aspects of our nature.

The first step in the direction of a perilous righteousness was when Bush announced on September 14, 2001: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." Jim Wallis, an evangelical Christian activist and editor of Sojourners Magazine, responds: "To say that they are evil and we are good, and that if you're not with us, you're with the terrorists--that's bad theology." He points to Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew: "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, your adversary's eye, your enemy's eye, and not see the log in your own eye? Why do you see the evil in them but not in yourself?" ("The Jesus Factor," 2003)

A year after 9/11, Bush continued in a similar vein, referring to America as the hope of all mankind. He referred to a light shining in the darkness that the darkness will not overcome. The phrase "the light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it" is from the Gospel of John, Wallis explains. "But it's about the light of Christ and the word of God. Now, all of a sudden, it's meant to be America as a beacon of light to the world. [Bush] changed the meaning of the text. It's no longer about the word of God, the light of Christ, it's about us. It's about us being the hope of the world. That is, again, bad theology" ("The Jesus Factor," 2003).

Omar Bakri Muhammad, the leader of the London-based radical Islamist movement al-Muhajiroun, asks potential followers: "When will people see this war in Iraq and Afghanistan for what it really is-- a Christian Crusade, full of the indiscriminate murder, rape and carnage just like, if not worse, than the Christian Crusades of 'Richard the Lionheart' and his own band of thugs in the past. Surely this is a wake-up call for all Muslims around the world who have any dignity left."

By attacking Iraq without considering the entire portfolio of risks we face, we have made the world a more dangerous place--for Americans and for America's allies. Most of the new risks introduced by our policies were entirely predictable. It was predictable that WMD might be disseminated rather than destroyed. It was predictable that the attack would be perceived as humiliating to Muslims, rather than as liberating, and that it would benefit Al Qaeda and the movement it inspired. It was predictable that the risk posed by Saddam would be reduced, but it would be transformed into a new risk posed by nonstate actors. It was predictable that by allowing interrogators to apply forms of pressure prohibited by international law, a slippery slope could lead to additional violations. It was--and remains--predictable that additional new risks could be introduced by the setting of a precedent for unilateral preventive war without Security Council approval.

The precautionary approach, as applied to Iraq, has made the world more dangerous and more uncertain. The war has split the allies, not the terrorists. It has turned Iraq into a Mecca for international terrorists, and mobilized local Shi'a and Salafi jihadist groups that had previously posed a minimal threat. It has facilitated connections between terrorists and those with formal military experience in Saddam's army, the lethal nightmare that the invasion was supposed to have thwarted. Antipathy toward the United States, not only in Iraq and throughout the entire Islamic world, but in Europe as well, has become a dangerous trend exploited by terrorists. Even as we tout our successes in rounding up Al Qaeda terrorists, the broader movement inspired by bin Laden and ignited by the invasion of Iraq is recruiting new nihilist minions throughout the world. The war in Iraq has not only been a distraction from the war on terrorism; it has strengthened our enemies in ways that continue to surprise and horrify us.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for policymakers in responding to the September 2001 terrorist strikes is to avoid a precautionary approach, which involves taking action to forestall our worst fears, while the attacks remain vivid in people's minds--what risk analysts refer to as "availability"--and to sustain the effort to reduce the threat, even during periods when the risk recedes from national consciousness.

NOTES

(1.) Other biases include a tendency by individuals to be overconfident in the accuracy of their assessments, even when those assessments are based on nothing more than guessing. People also seem to desire certainty: they respond to the anxiety of uncertainty by blithely ignoring uncertain risks and maintaining the belief that while others may be vulnerable (to driving accidents, for example), they themselves are not.

(2.) Individuals are more willing to pay for risk reduction when they believe zero risk is attainable, according to Nakayachi (1998).

(3.) For citations and more details, see Stern (1999).

(4.) These paragraphs on the precautionary principle are based on Weiner (2003). For a discussion of multiplicity, see Weiner.

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