



Quick Look

Principles of War Seminar
Threats, Dangers & Uncertainties
October 20, 2004

Overview

On Tuesday, October 12, 2004, the Office Force Transformation from the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Department of the Navy conducted the fifth seminar in the Principles of War Seminar Series.¹

The guest speaker was former U.S. National Security Advisor Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski.² He spoke on threats, dangers, uncertainties, and other issues that likely will shape our thinking about future security and the principles of war. A summary of his comments follows. Other points Dr. Brzezinski made during the question and answer session are attached.

Conventional Future – the Next 15 - 20 Years

* U.S. will remain the only global superpower.

* Europe will be in second place, but with a large question mark regarding its political and military power.

* China will be in third place, and in some respects, will be crowding Europe. Its military power will grow quite antiquated and will fall far behind the U.S., although it will maintain a minimal strategic nuclear deterrent capability. China will have a growing regional capability.

* Japan will be in fourth place. It will be a respected military power with a muscular regional capability. Japan could easily and quickly develop nuclear weapons and improve the accuracy of its long-range space-based missiles.

* India will be in fifth place, assuming it has internal stability.

Uncertain Security Challenges

The future discussed above will have many uncertainties and vulnerabilities. Dr. Brzezinski emphasized that *any analysis of the likelihood of violence must address the means and motives to carry out attacks*. It also must look at states and groups acting on their own or in conjunction with others, motivated by political, social, religious passions.

Dr. Brzezinski then described several uncertain security challenges.

* *Massive destructive nuclear war* is possible now only between the U.S. and Russia. In 15 to 20 years, it also could occur between the U.S. and China or between Russia and China.

¹ For additional information on the Principles of War Seminar Series, see:

<http://www.jhuapl.edu/POW/index.htm>

² Dr. Brzezinski currently is serving as Counselor, Center for Strategic & International Studies and Robert E. Osgood Professor of American Foreign Policy, the Paul Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University. His latest book, *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership*, was the basis for his presentation.

* *Regional nuclear war*, possibly between Pakistan and India.

* *Fragmenting, ethnically divisive local wars*, such as within Indonesia and India.

* Various forms of *national liberation movements*, such as with Muslims in Russia and Palestinians versus Israel.

* *Lash-out attacks against the U.S.*, anonymously, by weak countries.

* *Increasingly lethal terrorist attacks* by groups.

* *Paralyzing cyber attacks against the infrastructure of advanced societies* to plunge them into chaos.

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### **Immediate Threats to America**

There are many broad threats to the U.S. However, *after 9/11 we adopted a strategy based on an incorrect understanding of the threat*. The notion of declaring a global war on terrorism, the GWOT, as the U.S. response to those threats, lacks substance and content. *Terrorism is a technique for killing people*. However, by using it the way we are using it, we are confusing terrorism with the overall use of force. President Bush declaring the GWOT would have been like President Franklin Delano Roosevelt declaring war against the “blitzkrieg” or “kamikazes” during World War II. The term “*global war on terrorism*” *does not define the threat, does not tell us who the perpetrators are, where they come from, or why they are waging war against us*.

We must begin to understand what makes our enemies tick. To do this *we must understand modern history, religion,*

*culture, language, the reasons for anti-Americanism, the strong feelings concerning anti-colonialism* particularly toward the United Kingdom and France, *and the perception of biased U.S. support for Israel*.

Dr. Brzezinski mentioned the book *Imperial Hubris*, which analyzed what Osama bin Laden has been saying and contends that the *continued U.S. misdiagnosis of the threat is making it more difficult for us to see the civil war that is raging within Islam between militant radical Islamists and those who recognize that modernity must be incorporated into Islam*. The militant radical Islamists want to fuse their interpretation of Islam with a map depicting 16<sup>th</sup> century Islamic expansion and a political and social order reflecting the way of life in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> They are using this civil war to express their hatred for the U.S. and creating the reality of a head-on collision of Islam with the U.S. By referring to the “GWOT” we inadvertently are helping the militant radical Islamists achieve their objective.

The 9/11 Commission reported that international support for the U.S. plummeted based on U.S. reaction to the 9/11 attacks. U.S. actions may not be wrong, but they are not integrated well. For example, in March 2002 the U.S. effectively abandoned its traditional even-handed position of promoting a peaceful resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli dispute. Although initially welcomed, the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003 is looked at as an occupation and linked to Sharon’s treatment of the Palestinians and as if it were colonialism.

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<sup>3</sup> Map depicting the Muslim world circa AD 1500 is attached.

The U.S. involvement in Iraq and in the global war on terrorism is part of a larger U.S. role in a very large and troubled area of the world, Eurasia. What makes *Eurasia* particularly noteworthy is that it is *the tinderbox where the civil war within Islam is raging*. It is religiously aroused, socially deprived, and politically activated.

U.S. foreign policy after World War II was shaped by people who understood grand strategy and the European landscape. We had people who spoke the various European languages and who knew the history and understood the cultures of the European countries. Today, we do not have any such familiarity with Eurasia. We are conflicted by history, passion, cultures, and language. Eurasia has become “the global Balkans.”

We also are facing serious problems because the global war on terrorism has left us rather alone, with only a handful of allies. We are being bogged down in a very complex region, effectively uniting our enemies and dividing our friends.

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Implications for the Future

We have to recognize that at this juncture in our history we must not confuse our preponderance of power as omnipotence. Our military must be versatile and powerful, and must have global reach and agility.

Good intelligence is overwhelmingly important. The intelligence community must not just feed intelligence, but must discriminate. We need much better intelligence with objective and subjective attributes correlated to the threat.

Given the scope of the threat we face, enduring alliances based on genuinely shared interests are critically important. However, we must be wary of some allies. Each has their own agendas and desire to get the U.S. to solve or take the blame for their problems.

We need inclusiveness in our approach in this era of uncertainties. We must be sensitive to different cultures, have tolerance for diversity, embrace moderate Muslims, and give each a sense of participation with us. We also must have credibility for what we stand for. The abuses at Abu Ghraib seriously harmed us.

Economic vitality is absolutely essential to our future.

Dr. Brzezinski cautioned that each of these should be placed ahead of domestic security, which builds fear and only can produce a “fortress America” mindset in which we are isolated.

In this list of implications for the future, Dr. Brzezinski emphasized that we must place intelligence first.

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**CETO Conclusions**

Dr. Brzezinski’s views represent a window into what a possible Democratic Administration may outline as its foreign policy. Very little insights, however, can be gleaned about specific military issues. His views on the true source of Islamic terrorism and the critical importance of cultural intelligence match CETO’s Small Wars, irregular warfare, and Flashpoints projects. He may underestimate the role of domestic security as it relates to domestic support for U.S. foreign policy.

**Questions and Answers  
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**Counterterrorist Planning**

Counterterrorist planning must be standardized throughout the government under the National Security Council. This planning must consider everything and must be a construct to deal with diversity and cultural areas.

**Global War on Terrorism or a War Against Radical Islam?**

There probably were many reasons why the Administration chose to use the term “global war on terrorism.” Regardless of what it is called, this war will involve the use of some peaceful, non-kinetic means as well as traditional military ones. Its duration will be long term and it will involve a diversity of nations. We must become adept at knowing how to avoid offending our friends and making more enemies. Since 9/11, we have been reacting to Middle Eastern terrorists. We should define the area our enemies come from while not labeling them as Islamic. Dr. Brzezinski cited as an example how the United Kingdom dealt with the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland. The Brits did not declare war on Catholicism. Rather, they focused on dealing with the perpetrators of the terrorist acts, their funding sources, and popular support.

The term we select should be useful in defining who our enemies are, where they come from, and what makes them tick.

Also, we should realize that the major problems we face today are not just terrorism. Large parts of the world are in turmoil. Terror is only one aspect.

Dr. Brzezinski commented that not every act of violence is a terrorist act. Our enemies can use a variety of other means to attack us. He added that terrorism would fade only when many other things are brought under control.

We must be willing to face complex challenges. GWOT is a simplification of the real problems we face. Furthermore, terrorism is not just a Middle Eastern phenomenon. Although terrorism directed against the U.S. is a Middle Eastern phenomenon, millions of other people around the world have been victims of terrorism as well.

With regards to the U.S. policy of promoting democratization throughout the world, prior to World War II and its aftermath, Germany had a history of democracy while the Japanese Emperor was the symbol of Japanese unity. If Saudi Arabia were to have an election today, and the two candidates were Crown Prince Abdallah and Osama bin Laden, is there any doubt who would win? Democracy takes root gradually and has to be nurtured from the inside. It cannot be done by us. And it must be done for political dignity, not political domination.

**Threats Posed by Emerging Nuclear Powers**

Over the next 15 to 20 years, nations or terrorist groups that acquire nuclear weapons will be able to inflict serious damage to the United States. However, they will not be in a position to inflict

overwhelming, unrecoverable damage. If they attacked us today, we most likely would know who attacked us and from where the attack came. Our enemies know we would retaliate and obliterate them.

The greatest, newest danger to the U.S. is from emerging nuclear powers willing to share their technology with terrorist groups to use against us. We could be hurt very badly by such an attack. Furthermore, we would not be able to detect the source of the attack. What reduces this possibility is that emerging nuclear powers tend to be preoccupied with security or terrorism vis-à-vis their neighbors.

### **Can We Win in Iraq?**

We cannot possibly win in Iraq without getting other countries involved. The longer we stay, the worse the situation will become. Violence only breeds more resistance, and we must realize that there will be political consequences to the U.S. killing women and children. We must get the Iraqi people and the world to feel we have a broad policy that addresses the global war on terrorism as well as the specific problems in Middle East. We also must sooth Iran to reduce tensions. The bottom line is that without movement on the Israeli-Palestinian front, there will be no Pakistani troops in Iraq; the same goes for moderate Islamic states.

Leaders of terrorist groups are largely from collapsing traditional societies. They often have studied abroad and have expanded their vision. They recognize the great need for change within their own countries and are willing to take extreme action.

### **Negotiating with Terrorists**

We do not need to negotiate with terrorists, but we do need to address the conditions, which cause terrorism. We cannot ferret out the terrorists by ourselves. We need targeting information from local people, which may not be dependable. They have their own reasons for giving us faulty information. Perhaps over time, when the people see that this will help them, the information they give us will get better. We need to be sensitive to the complexities that motivate people.

### **What Will Happen After U.S. Elections?**

The United States is a pragmatic country with pragmatic leaders. Regardless of who wins the U.S. 2004 presidential election, the time may be right to disengage from Iraq after the Iraqi election scheduled for the end of January 2005. If it is a political success, then a U.S. withdrawal may be possible. As soon as possible after the Iraqi election, we should say we have created conditions for the new Iraqi government to succeed, that we have fulfilled our promise, and then we should leave. However, if there is no progress on the Israeli-Palestinian front, any new Iraqi government will be anti-U.S.

What we see on television is a vast exaggeration. Dangers in some locations prevent journalists from traveling to and reporting on other more peaceful and safe areas. On the other hand, the “mission accomplished” announcement also was a vast exaggeration.

The percentage of American servicemen and women affected by the war in Iraq,

killed, maimed, sick, exceeds 20 to 25 thousand. Still, there is willingness in the U.S. to tolerate military operations, engagement, and casualties. If there were a great cry from within the country, the contenders for the White House would be fighting to get us out of Iraq.

### **What Could We Have Done Differently to Avoid Where We Are Now?**

The world will remain vulnerable and dependent on oil for the next 15 to 20 years. We need to change our energy policy, and should have done so long ago. But today, the growing global need for oil is skyrocketing, especially in developing countries like China and India as well as in Europe.

We need to get beyond the Camp David Accords and find a truly acceptable, peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian problem.

### **Threats to Israel**

Syria is not a significant military threat to Israel. Iran is not a direct military or political threat to Israel, but it will challenge Israel's monopoly on nuclear weapons. Israel wants the U.S. to stay involved. Iran is not an imminent issue, which should give us time. We should avoid the feud between Iranian mullahs and the young Iranian elites who do not like living in a theocracy, who want to be modernized, but who are nationalistic and feel they should not be deprived of having nuclear weapons, especially if Israel has them. Iran is a serious country, playing a serious role.

### **Conclusion**

We cannot do it alone. If alone, we will be out. If we try to act, our problems will be expanded.

We cannot disintegrate our strength in the global Balkans.

**Muslim World**  
Circa AD 1500

