



AMERICA TEN YEARS AFTER 9-11

By Edward A. Turzanski

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Thinking back to that awful September day in 2011, the first thing to come to mind is that given the rapid-fire series of simultaneous, systemic and symbolic attacks that was ripping across television screens (a tell-tale sign of Al Qaeda of the day), few would have believed that America would go at least a decade with no other successful mass-casualty attack on the United States. That is not to say that there have been no other attempted attacks, or that like-minded fellow travelers of Al Qaeda have not spilled blood on U.S. soil.

Whether by plane (Richard Reid tried to bring down an American airliner just in time for Christmas in 2001 by lighting a bomb in his shoes, and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab came close on Christmas Day in 2009 as he unsuccessfully tried to light a bomb in his underpants on an Amsterdam to Detroit flight), or train (Times Square has been the target of a planned attack on the 42nd Street subway station in September 2005), or automobile (another failed attack against Times Square, this time by car bomb, occurred on May 1, 2010; Mayor Bloomberg suggested that someone unhappy with the Obama health plan was probably responsible, and then, quite unhelpfully from the Mayor's perspective, a 30-year old naturalized Pakistani by the name of Faisal Shahzad was arrested for the attack), Islamists keep on trying to kill people (preferably non-Muslim Americans) in the United States.

The closest Islamists have come to killing Americans in large numbers (at least that we know of) was at the largest American military installation in the world—which just happens to be Fort Hood, Texas. There, on the 5th of November 2009, a taxpayer-trained psychologist and Major in the U.S. Army, Nidal Malik Hasan, went on a shooting spree in which he killed 13 and wounded 43.

Prior to the shooting, Major Hasan wrote some 20 e-mail messages to the most wanted U.S-born terrorist, a radical Yemeni-American cleric named Anwar al-Awlaki, asking for guidance on religious obligations, including whether it would be justified for a Muslim-American soldier to kill fellow soldiers. In the months before the Fort Hood shootings, Hasan alarmed many colleagues by becoming increasingly outspoken against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and he became preoccupied with the conflict between the religious obligations of Muslims and the American military's role in fighting in Muslim countries. Supervisors minimized the concerns brought to their attention and a few, but not all, of the e-mail messages to al-Awlaki were intercepted and passed on to a Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF). A Defense Department analyst examined them and decided the queries were part of Major Hasan's research and warranted no further investigation.

By all accounts, Hasan was a ticking time-bomb (or if one prefers a more precise metaphor, a willful shooter), and no one dared bring his pattern of peculiar behavior to the attention of the appropriate authority—because of the very real risk of being accused of religious discrimination and thus ending one's career. Bad moves *before* consequences are known are frustrating enough, but what can be said when the same kind of politically-correct ethos trumps common sense *after* troops who had survived the dangers of Iraq and Afghanistan are shot by one of their own at home? Surely, intelligent people would recognize that, in the case of Hasan, the fear of offending had trumped the simple meaning of words, and the Army severely failed in its obligations to its own troops.

Bad habits die hard, however, and while on "Meet the Press" just three days after the attack, the commanding General of the U.S. Army, General George Casey, spoke these (unfortunate) words: "*Our diversity not only in our Army, but in our country, is a strength. And as horrific as this tragedy was, if our diversity becomes a casualty, I think that's worse.*"¹ That loss of "diversity"

¹ Transcript of "Meet the Press" Program from November 8, 2009, available at: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/33752275/ns/meet_the_press/t/meet-press-transcript-nov/

would be considered more important than the greatest loss of life ever at the largest U.S. military installation on American soil raises a question of priorities. So, too, does an 86-page Army review of the incident which failed to mention the specific ideological motivations of the alleged shooter.

Major Hasan acted based upon a very specific religious and political belief system. It just happens to be the same one that inspired Osama Bin Laden and his Al Qaeda network to wage a decade-long war against U.S. interests *before* and *after* it killed nearly 2,900 innocent people in New York, Washington and Shanksville, PA on September 11, 2001. Every misstep in U.S. responses to Al Qaeda before and after 9-11 has shared the common error of minimizing or even ignoring the Islamist motivation of the movement and its adherents, largely out of fear that offense will be given. This approach was at the root of the decision of the then-new Obama Administration and its Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Janet Napolitano prohibited the use of the term “terrorism” and instead used the deceptively neutral one of “man caused disaster.”

Napolitano was not neutral, however, when she noted that one of the main terror-related concerns for DHS were returning veterans from the Afghan and Iraq Wars. In that particular case, she emphasized that the veterans were susceptible to “right wing” extremist views. Napolitano has since apologized for the insult, but the larger problem remains: one of failing to comprehend the simple meaning of words and the consequences of their purposeful usage.

Another illustration of the point saw the replacement of the unhelpful Bush-era term “War on Terror” with the ostensibly less antagonistic “Overseas Contingency Operations.” One of the initial problems for Bush Administration in responding to 9-11 had to do with accurately describing both the nature of the threat and the motivations of the adversary; this was especially true in a hyper-sensitive political environment where anything that remotely resembled criticism of a minority group or its religion drew howls of protest from cultural elites (criticisms of Christianity and Judaism excepted). Seven years after 9-11, the Bush Administration was still talking about a “War on Terror.” Even for government work, that was not good enough.

Terror is a tactic, and wars are waged against people and ideologies, not tactics (by way of example: during the Blitz when he steeled the resolve of his nation and roused them to fight, Churchill spoke of defeating “Hitler and his Nazi gang” – he did not declare war against aerial bombardment). If there is one deficiency that ought to be remedied in the war against the Islamists and their world view it is the consistent use of clear, unambiguous, courageous language by our top elected officials. The American nation was, and still is, not rallied to action with a clear explanation of who the Islamists really are and why the American culture is better than theirs. It is a matter of personal opinion, but this writer thinks that President Obama is weaker on this point than his predecessor (who was far too inconsistent in meeting the rhetorical requirements of the Presidency); and both men are outclassed by a considerable extent by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair (once thought a pale imitation of Bill Clinton in domestic politics, he rose to Thatcherite and Churchillian eloquence in explaining whom we fight and why).

In somewhat typical American fashion, the terribly messy work of clarifying ideas and redressing deficiencies in strategy has instead led to the creation of large, expensive structures. Have a problem in which CIA and FBI do not play well with one another (as evidenced by the stunningly inexplicable refusal to share intelligence about the movement of terror suspects pre-9-11)? Try creating an additional bureaucratic level in the intelligence structure—as was done with the creation of the position of Director of National Intelligence (DNI).

Since the 9-11 Commission recommended the creation of the DNI position in 2004, it has seen five different occupants in a period of six years. Leaving aside the numerous slips of the tongue by current DNI James Clapper (the Muslim Brotherhood is a “secular” group, and other misstatements), the addition of another level of bureaucracy with the creation of the DNI, without granting him complete budgetary authority over all the agencies which are nominally under his control, leads one to believe that the goal had more to do with political cover (appearing to acquiesce in the wishes of the 9-11 Commission) than a sincere belief in the principle (a DNI-type position had long been opposed by intelligence officials, principally out of fears that the absolute control by one person or entity would lead to fear-driven “group-think”—i.e., “toe the corporate line or lose your budget.”).

In Washington, as in life, the iron-clad rule “You pay, you say!” is in full force. From September 11, 2001 through the end of August 2011, approximately \$635.9 billion had been spent on homeland security in the United States.² Though local law enforcement and first responders no doubt acquired better resources and training during this period of lavish spending, petty politics and cries over the lack of “fairness” suggests that efficiency sometimes (if not too often) gave way to political

² 10 Years After 9/11: How Far Did \$635 Billion Spent on Homeland Security Go?, Adam Stone, EmergencyManagement.com, August 31, 2011, available at: <http://www.emergencymgmt.com/safety/10-Years-After-911-Homeland-Security-Funding.html>, also: Huge size of DHS contractor workforce leaves senators 'astonished' - 200,000 contract workers outnumber DHS civilian workforce, Alice Lipowicz, Federal Computer Week, March 01, 2010, available at: <http://fcw.com/articles/2010/03/01/dhs-has-too-many-contract-employees-senators-charge.aspx>; and for a similar concern about the growth of private intelligence-related contractors, see: Top Secret America: The Rise of the New American Security State, Dana Priest and William M. Arkin (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2011)

expediency, yielding more than a little wasteful spending (e.g., wanting to guarantee that New York and Omaha both received homeland security funding, even though only one had been attacked on 9-11, remains a target this day, and has members of its counter-terror bureau collecting intelligence in Pakistani madrassas). The point becomes more focused when one realizes that the 22-agency DHS civilian workforce of 188,000 (which does not include Coast Guard uniformed employees) is supplemented by another 200,000 private contractor employees, and that in the brave new world of \$1.5 trillion annual deficits and near-100% of GDP (\$14.5 trillion national debt), for the first time in the post-9-11 world, counter-terror, intelligence and the military will face a much more difficult competition for severely limited budgetary dollars.

National Security on an austerity budget will be one of the defining challenges as America moves towards its second post-9-11 decade. Robert Gates, who spanned both post-9-11 Presidential Administrations used the occasion of his departure from government service to deliver some blunt, uncomfortable truths to allies abroad and fellow citizens at home. He told America's NATO allies that the U.S. can no longer assume the current 75 percent to 95 percent of the burden for combined military operations, depending upon the mission. For example, in the Libyan campaign's first week, the British notified their allies that they had run out of cruise missiles. Their arsenal consisted of a total of 62, and only 12 could be used (the rest held in reserve to defend Britain itself). By that point, the U.S. had fired 120 missiles at a cost of \$1-\$1.5 million each. As for the French, their only aircraft carrier—the Charles DeGaulle—had to leave the theater of battle because its engine had failed. At least they have one. Mighty Britain, which once ruled the waves, has no aircraft carrier; but the U.S. has 10.

Gates was as equally blunt when speaking to his fellow countrymen about the tremendous burden borne by America's all-volunteer military since 9-11: *"The all-volunteer force conceived in the 1970s was designed to train, prepare, and deploy for a major and quick conventional conflict, either against the Soviet Union on the plains of Central Europe or a contingency such as the first Gulf War against Iraq in 1991... By contrast, the recent post-9/11 campaigns have required prolonged, persistent combat and support from across the military... Since the invasion of Iraq, more than a million soldiers and Marines have been deployed into the fight. The Navy has put nearly 100,000 sailors on the ground while maintaining its sea commitments around the globe. And the Air Force, by one count, has been at war since 1991, when it first began enforcing the no-fly zone over Iraq."*³

When 9-11 was still a fresh wound, the Bush Administration made caricature an easy sport for its political opponents by urging Americans to continue to shop at malls as a way of maintaining all aspects of normal life (e.g., a-la Churchill: We shall fight them at Neshaminy, and at Oxford Valley, and at King of Prussia, and at Franklin Mills...). Unfortunately, some 99 percent of the country did that and little else, leaving the remaining 1 percent to do the heavy lifting as members of the all-volunteer, stop-lossed military service. Lest one think that burden sharing tone-deafness was peculiar only to the Bush White House, Gates also observed that: "The state of Alabama, with a population of less than 5 million, has 10 Army ROTC host programs... The Los Angeles metro area, population over 12 million, has four host ROTC programs. And the Chicago metro area, population 9 million, has three."⁴ "Red State" America—typically the places where people "cling to their guns and religion"—supplies a disproportionately large percentage of the nation's fighting force than its blue state elitist counterparts. Why this is the case is worthy of examination, because it speaks to the last and, in many ways, most important aspect of America in the first post-9-11 decade: the national rift between those who believe that 9-11 and the threats that flowed from it are primarily a matter of national security and war fighting, and those who believe that the best way to fight Islamist terrorism is with the tools and procedures of domestic law enforcement.

The USA PATRIOT Act, much reviled by elites within arts and entertainment, the news media, higher education and the legal establishment, finally gave to counter-terror officials means used by their colleagues in law enforcement for decades in fighting organized crime and drug lords. Though the protection of sources and methods has precluded a comprehensive analysis of precisely how many acts of terror have been prevented because of the act, two facts (or, depending upon one's point of view, "factoids") should be noted. First, there has been no successful mass-casualty attack in the U.S. in the past decade. Second, when those who spoke most vociferously against the act had control of the White House and both Houses of Congress by veto-proof majorities, they did not repeal the act. The USA PATRIOT Act was passed just as Mr. Madison had envisioned: the President proposed, Congress responded with changes, and a modified version with sunset provisions and the need for re-authorization was enacted into law. The same cannot be said of Supreme Court decisions granting, among other rights, full constitutional protections to illegal enemy combatants, and misguided attempts to grant terrorists trials in civilian courts with all elements of discovery and Fifth Amendment protections. One of the under-appreciated aspects of 9-11's lessons is that of exigency—what should counter-terror officials be able to do with the "ticking time bomb" when there is no time to allow investigations to blossom in-full or when cooperative terrorist detainees are in short supply. The issue is most neatly distilled in the controversy over alleged torture.

Leaving aside the contention that enhanced interrogation techniques such as "water-boarding" constitute torture (if they do, one must wonder why America routinely "tortures" its own pilots, intelligence officers and others who undergo the procedure as part of the SERE—Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape training), Americans will need to answer this question: If

³ Gates Praises Service, Sacrifice of All-Volunteer Force, Jim Garamone, American Forces Press Service, September 29, 2010, available at: <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=61068>

⁴ Ibid.

water-boarding, or even torture, applied in only the most extreme circumstances, could have prevented 9-11, or if it could prevent the next one, which would be chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear in nature, and thus prevent the death of not 2,900, but 29,000 or 290,000 or 2.9 million, should it be done?⁵ The question, ultimately, is one of extremes; and it comes after a great many basic procedures of law enforcement, counter-terrorism, and the ordinary rules of law have been judiciously applied. Yet if 9-11 teaches but one lesson, it is that the unimaginable is no longer a stranger to America's borders; and when it returns, it could very likely lead to greater loss of life; which, in turn, would trigger even more severe responses than the post-9-11 American military and intelligence actions seen to date. Thankfully, 9-11 did not produce mass arrests, internment camps, wholesale deportations or unlimited warfare—but no one can predict, with absolute certainty, how the U.S. would respond to an absolute worst-case terror scenario. That said, better to stop the attack than to respond after the fact. Ten years on, we cannot take complete comfort in the death of Bin Laden. His passing will not energize the Islamist movement, but neither did it shut down Al Qaeda's tech-savvy "Inspire" on-line magazine or bring a halt to threats against the American homeland.

Perhaps the best summation of the American security posture ten years after 9-11 comes from 9-11 Commission co-chairman Lee Hamilton: "*In my mind, there is no doubt that we are much better prepared than we were 10 years ago... Are we where we need to be? No, I don't think we are.*"⁶ Hamilton and his colleagues are concerned that 9 crucial procedural and structural recommendations of the commission have not been implemented (e.g., reserving "D Block" emergency band widths so that first responders can enjoy greater inter-operability; cargo and passenger screening for air and other public travel; DNI powers; tracking visitors to and from the U.S.; port cargo screening; and streamlining DHS reporting to Congress).⁷ Improving upon what are supposed to be "best practices" procedures will always be on the national to-do counter-terror list, and in this respect, the reminder from the 9-11 Commission is helpful. What these procedural recommendations do not speak to, however, is the question of whether the civilization of the West is strong enough and sufficiently confident to defeat an adversary who sees himself as called to martyrdom by his God. So far, the secular societies of the West have had a difficult time understanding or responding to a culturally confident, religiously motivated adversary. Immediately after 9-11, the American nation summoned enough resolve to fight the people who brought down the World Trade Towers. It is troubling to note that they have not been re-built, and that there is greater hostility in many elite circles towards those who water-boarded the ring leaders who destroyed the towers than to the terrorists themselves. This is a cautionary note: unless the American culture consistently summons the will to defend itself, yet another commission will ask why the lessons of 9-11 were not understood and embraced.

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⁵ Professor Alan M. Dershowitz, whose liberal political credentials are well known, has argued persuasively that outright torture should be legalized in the form of court-approved "torture warrants." For a discussion of the issue, see: To Torture or Not to Torture, Barry Gewen, The New York Times, September 17, 2008, Available at: <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/09/17/to-torture-or-not-to-torture/>

⁶ 9-11 Commissioners urge action on 9 crucial issues, Adam Sege, The Philadelphia Inquirer, September 1, 2011, p a20.

⁷ Ibid.