

**VIII Atlantic International Symposium  
8-9 May 2007  
Military High Studies Institute  
Lisbon, Portugal**

**RETHINKING INTELLIGENCE FOR THE CULTURE WARS  
OF THE EARLY 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY  
Peter C. Oleson**

Obrigado Admiral Rodolfo for the invitation

Obrigado General Leandro

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I was asked to speak on American views on the East-West Dialogue on Terrorism. Perhaps the title of my speech concerning “culture wars” appears a bit confusing, or off the topic. But to my mind it is not.

I dislike the American term “global war on terrorism.” I dislike even more its mindless acronym “GWOT.” Terrorism is a tactic, a tactic traditionally used by weaker opponents against the stronger. Terrorist tactics are ageless: one terrorist tactic – assassination – was a favorite of a radical Shi’a sect in Syria in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, it is from them that the term “assassin” derives. We often think of terrorists as political or religious zealots. That term derives from a 1<sup>st</sup> century anti-Roman Jewish sect, which committed random murders. Terrorism has been around for a long time.

The United States’ response to the unforeseen al-Qai’da attacks of 11 September 2001 has been based on the shock of being attacked. In some ways the 9-11 attacks were more shocking than Japan’s surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. In 1941, tensions with Japan were high and Hawaii was a distant territorial archipelago of the United States. New York and Washington, however, were two of America’s central cities, in the continental heartland, that had not seen hostile foreign action since the British paid us some visits in the war of 1812 to 1814. I cannot over-emphasize the communal shock felt by all. It is understandable that the United States responded in a violent way with a “war on terrorism.”

But terrorism is a symptom of an underlying illness, not something against which one can wage a war in any traditional sense. I have already noted that terrorism is an ancient tactic. So what is the “illness”?

It is a clash of cultures occurring around the world between many traditional societies and a perceived homogeneous culture, largely based on American pop culture, which is viewed as threatening to the existing order. It is the threatening part of “globalization,” especially to those who are not leading and benefiting from globalization.

Ironically, the culture wars that envelop our planet today are the result of Information Technology. Today few places in the world are insulated from television, radio, or the Worldwide Web. People everywhere can see, and desire for themselves, the obvious riches portrayed on American or European television. Others see, and abhor, the violence and depictions of sexual activity that emanate from Hollywood and elsewhere, especially those in more conservative societies.

Fear of losing one’s own culture is closely tied to loss of relevance and dignity. Dignity is a universal factor in all societies. A man whose dignity and self-worth is stolen today can be expected to be an adversary tomorrow.

There are many aspects to the culture wars – and note that I use the plural. This is not one, easy to analyze, global conflict. It is many conflicts, rooted in local circumstances, but which have common threads. Again, Information Technology allows one local group to learn of another’s struggle, and to learn from it.

The Culture Wars have roots in many elements of life. These include:

- First, *Religion*. While always a major factor in conflicts, in our modern time, religion became a far more important factor in and after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. In many places, religion has become radicalized – often because it is only the religious institutions that can oppose the repressive autocracy of many regimes. A prime example is the impact of Sayyid Qutb’s radical Islamist’s thoughts on the Muslim Brotherhood and on al-Qai’da’s Ayman al-Zawahiri.
- Second, *Economics*. Global trade is not equal. Protectionist measures in the United States and the EU and elsewhere hurt subsistence agricultural economies in Africa, Central America and elsewhere. “Yanqui economic imperialism” is a theme that resonates in Latin America and is exploited by modern caudillos.

- Third, *Politics*. The Arab defeat in 1967 has been seen as precipitating the awakening of Arab Islamists. Seeing the relative freedoms of Western nations on TV or the Web can only call attention to the lack of individual political freedom in many countries throughout the Middle East and elsewhere.
- Fourth, *Societal factors*. As Yale University Professor Amy Chua has pointed out most non-Western countries have social and ethnic structures totally different from what we have in the West. For example, the extended family unit – “clans” in certain societies, do not exist in the globalized Western democracies to the same extent. The role of women differs.<sup>1</sup> There are many other societal differences that we could think of.
- And, fifth, *Expectations*. The Information Technology revolution of the past six decades has raised the expectations of many around the world. This has caused fear in some authoritarian governments. Note how the communist regimes of Eastern Europe tried to jam Western broadcasts, and how Cuba still does. It has also caused frustration within the populaces that do not see material or political progress and who view their governments or market-dominant minorities<sup>2</sup> with a hostile eye. Western support for undemocratic governments fuels the hostility the repressed population feels.

Where are these culture wars? Let me cite a few examples:

- First and foremost, I must mention “radical Islam of violent jihadists.” But “radical Islam” is not a single entity. It exists in many countries, and exhibits difference characteristics in those countries.
  - The situation in Iraq, with its three-way civil war, differs from the Taliban religious terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
  - The Jemaah Islamiya rebellion in the Philippines has deep roots in the politics of those islands.
  - The anti-western clan warfare in Somalia illustrates some unique cultural aspects to that region.
  - It would take all day to describe the Palestinian situation. Suffice it to say that this is a traditional political terrorism campaign with increasing religious overtones from Hezbollah.
  - Iran’s confrontation with the West (and with Russia) is nationalistic as well as cultural – demonstrating how these factors can be mixed.
  - I suspect it is only the benefits from oil production that suppresses the clash of Saudi wahhabism with western, secular nations.

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<sup>1</sup> A less well known example is African Islamic polygamy, which is not tolerated in Western democracies, although it exists *sub rosa* in New York City among East African immigrants.

<sup>2</sup> Amy Chua, World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability, 2003.

- I view Venezuela's increasingly hostile relationship with the United States as partly an anti-free market cultural clash, exacerbated by a particularly incendiary personality.<sup>3</sup>
- North Korea's 60-year isolation, and its xenophobic small ruling elite, has created a cultural chasm that makes even the simplest of diplomacy difficult.

These culture wars are not national wars. In some ways the nation-state is irrelevant to them. They are fought at a sub-national level and even at an individual level. It is interesting to note that captured al-Qai'da operatives have stated that they consider "themselves" (as individuals) to be at war with the United States.

Information Technology is also the principal weapon of the Culture Wars. The roadside bomb has limited effect – unless its detonation is videotaped and disseminated over the Web to inspire supporters, recruit susceptible disaffecteds, and sway public opinion in the adversary's body politic. From the Western perspective, Information Technology is a critical weapon to stopping terrorism by attacking the underlying illness of the clash of cultures. After all, it was information that largely won the Cold War. NATO militaries restrained the communist threat, but did not bring down the Berlin Wall. The West won the war largely through dissemination of its ideals to those who desired it. The same is necessary in the current Culture Wars, which I fear will continue for the next two decades or more.

So what is the impact of these thoughts on western intelligence? How do we need to change our thinking?

First and foremost, I think we need to acknowledge that in the culture wars the military, as currently constituted in many countries, is largely irrelevant. Armies, navies and air forces will have little impact on the irregular warfare conducted by hostile groups that, as Mao said, "swim among the masses." This means that a lot of the intelligence focused today on support to military operations will have little impact on the culture wars. Rather intelligence needs to focus on individuals. This is to support both a counter-terrorism strategy – to prevent attacks, and a counter-insurgency strategy – to win over the population.

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<sup>3</sup> Hugo Chavez.

Intelligence needs to support a population-centric approach to identify cellular and often amorphous hostile elements and win the support of people who suffer from terrorist attacks, most of which target the innocent for the purposes of intimidation or political blackmail. Ironically, my country, which is composed of peoples from many cultures, often lacks the detailed cultural awareness of local populaces in the areas that are attractive to terrorists – areas lacking in national institutions and law enforcement.

Intelligence analysis must support public diplomacy and nation building. I view nation building as a long term challenge that should provide peoples the opportunities that they wish for and a sense of cultural dignity. America's recent record of nation building in Iraq and elsewhere is not encouraging.

Since 1947, when the Central Intelligence Agency was established, in the United States there has been a distinct separation between the US Intelligence Community and the law enforcement community. Americans traditionally have been paranoid about creating a gestapo. Yet the challenges of modern terrorist networks mandate a much closer association between intelligence and law enforcement. Many analyses have highlighted the close ties between terrorism and crime – drug trafficking, credit card fraud, internet scams.<sup>4</sup> Since the attacks of 11 September 2001, the barriers separating intelligence and law enforcement in the United States have been attacked. But it will take years before there is a seamless intercourse between the two.

While terrorists largely still employ the gun and the bomb, intelligence needs to focus on new threats that are emerging in our technological world. The first is cyber-terrorism and the second is biological attacks.

- Cyber-terrorism has often been predicted but has not yet occurred. There is a danger in the “cry wolf” phenomenon. Literature captured in Kabul in November 2001 included many technical documents from al-Qai'da, in English, Arabic, German, Turkish, Kurdish, and Russian, that yields a profile of al-Qai'da operatives well-educated and trained in the use of computers. While a cyber attack is unlikely to cause the mass casualties that crashing airliners did, such an attack could cause economic damage on a similar scale. Consider the impact if the SWIFT inter-bank electronic funds transfer network<sup>5</sup> were disabled or one or

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<sup>4</sup> The US Drug Enforcement Administration noted in 2003 that 14 out of the 36 terrorist groups listed by the State Department were also involved in drug trafficking.

<sup>5</sup> Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications

more major financial institutions were electronically ravaged, as Sumimoto Bank almost was. I note Osama Bin Laden's 2004 communiqué in which he expressed a "bleed until bankruptcy" strategy. Most internet security experts recognize that there is a *sub rosa* conflict already on-going over the internet. While most fingers point to China as being involved, the technical skills for such attacks have proliferated through widespread education in the Information Technology society. As cyber attacks are hard to detect until they are underway, the challenge for intelligence is predicting such attacks with sufficient specificity to allow containment and rapid remediation. This is no small challenge.

- Despite al-Qai'da's expressed interest in nuclear weapons, I believe the second emerging threat comes from the revolution in bio-technology. The deciphering of the human genome holds great promise for mankind – such as the development of individualized drugs or gene therapies. However, there is a dark side too. The same technologies being pushed by the trillion-dollar medical market could support the development of binary biological weapons, synthetic genes, genetically-engineered pathogens, stealth viruses, host-swapping diseases, or "designer" diseases. We are not the only targets for biological terrorism. Our agriculture is a vulnerable target. Consider the impact of contaminating the concentrated feedlots in Chicago or Kansas City. American beef distribution and international trade would come to a halt. The cost could be in the tens to hundreds of billions of dollars. Such bio-terror efforts will be hard to foresee, as their detectable signature is small and not susceptible to many traditional intelligence collection disciplines.

Specifically, what are some of the things the international intelligence establishments should do?

In the realm of intelligence collection:

- Great emphasis has to be placed on human source intelligence. It is the local person who will observe something out of the ordinary that will be the key to unmasking a terrorist cell. This, of course, is most difficult in a hostile population; hence my earlier comment on the necessity of winning over populations through nation-building and other means. Local law enforcement officials are key. Human intelligence suffers from being slow. Any procedure or system that can speed its reporting and correlation with other intelligence should be pursued.
- The worldwide communications network is a legitimate intelligence target. Terror groups use the internet for communication and coordination, propaganda, recruiting, fund raising, and profitable criminal activities. There is a challenge to effective intelligence collection from the sheer volume of internet communications and the spreading use of high grade, publicly available encryption. While most of us would prefer that our personal and business communications were only shared with our intended recipients, to protect the citizens from the effects of terrorism, such privacy is an unaffordable luxury. The

EU debate in past years over the “Echelon” controversy has always struck me as well intentioned but terribly naïve.

Intelligence analysis needs to be improved. Our policy leaders and counter-terrorism operatives need to understand the cultural factors that help breed terrorism in many places in this world. Analysis is hard. It takes time. It requires long lead times for specialists to develop their expertise. Analysis is under-funded in many western countries. In the U.S., it receives a small fraction of the intelligence budget. The American Congress is always reluctant to grow the government bureaucracy. What we need in the U.S. are incentives for students to become experts, and to learn foreign languages and cultures. If this “culture wars” environment is to last for decades, as I fear given Osama Bin Laden’s expressed 25-year strategy for war against the “far enemy”, this investment is warranted. In my view, some of you here represent countries with great advantages in language and cultural ties that can contribute to this need.

We need to invest in the technologies that will be useful in opposing the terrorist threat:

- We already know that we need to be able to track individuals (not tanks and armies – we can already do that). Terrorists are most vulnerable when they travel from one place to another. We need innovations, such as biometric technologies, that will allow us to identify rapidly someone positively and without requiring his or her active cooperation. Iris recognition, for example, (and there are other technologies) allows for positive identification using a remote camera. If used regularly at airports, train stations, on busses, at border crossings, in public buildings, and other choke points, such a technology could allow tracking of suspects and the linking of suspects. The British have done this effectively with their Tube cameras following the 7 July 2005 London train bombings.
- While controversial, the former research project at the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, called Total Information Awareness (TIA), held great promise. It is easy to identify massed armies or deployed ships or airplanes. It is orders of magnitude more difficult to tie together amorphous terrorist groups. The computing requirements of a program like TIA were daunting, but within the realm of the possible in the near term. Terrorists leave a trail and have a signature. The correlation of disparate data – travel reservations, telephone calls, credit card receipts, et. cetera, can help identify such people.
- A related field needing emphasis is computer forensics. The capture of so much electronic media from al-Qai’da houses has challenged intelligence services’ abilities to exploit such media. A terrorist’s computer can provide tremendous intelligence on past activities, communications, associates, plans, techniques, and

other topics. An increased ability to correlate data from multiple captured computers is needed.

- I could add a long list of promising technologies for fighting terrorism, including video analysis and correlation, voice recognition, individual behavior modeling, and detection of individual pheromones that may be associated with extreme behavior. There are others too.
- The threat of biological attack grows with time. The West has no effective defense against engineered pathogens. We cannot even recognize them. It can take weeks or longer to identify an unknown pathogen and its critical elements. We need the ability to anticipate and detect such threats in a very short timeframe.

Critical to many of the suggestions I have mentioned is the need for sharing of intelligence.<sup>6</sup>

- Since the critical evaluations of the U.S. Intelligence Community concerning the attacks of 11 September and the Iraqi WMD misdiagnosis, the Community has implemented major improvements by increased information sharing and collaboration. Within the government at large, an intelligence sharing communications system is being planned.<sup>7</sup> Within the Intelligence Community systems are being implemented that allow Wikipedia-like editing of analyses (but without the anonymity). Hopefully, more peer review of analyses will avert the “group-think” biases of some past flawed estimates. I note a similar conclusion by the British Intelligence Security Committee concerning Security Service and Special Branch cooperation in its review of the 2005 London train bombings.<sup>8</sup>
- Nations have always shared intelligence – but to a limited degree. Sharing has expanded and improved greatly since 2001. But if we are to neutralize the scourge of terrorism, which reaches across borders with ease and strikes at the innocent for effect, we must do much more. There are significant impediments: concerns about protecting sources or sensitive methods, political differences (the “terrorist” versus “freedom fighter” debate<sup>9</sup>), and legal differences.

Increased data sharing is mandatory<sup>10</sup>, especially related to identities. In the U.S. we have a centralized data base of suspected terrorists and their associates, called the

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<sup>6</sup> See AFCEA Intelligence Committee White Paper *The Need to Share: The U.S. Intelligence Community and Law Enforcement*, April 2007.

<sup>7</sup> The Intelligence Sharing Environment (ISE). The program office for which is within the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

<sup>8</sup> Intelligence and Security Committee *Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005*, May 2006, paragraph 146 and Recommendation S.

<sup>9</sup> One example is the Muslim Uighurs of western China. Are they terrorists or nationalist insurgents?

<sup>10</sup> Reference the 2004 US-EU Summit Declaration on Combating Terrorism.

Terrorist Information Data Environment (or TIDE).<sup>11</sup> From this data base others within the U.S. Government draw intelligence to support visa application reviews, criminal investigations, no-fly restrictions, and border crossing denials. Would we all not be well served by an international version that alerts security and law enforcement officials everywhere that Mr. X or Madame Z is a suspected terrorist? If tied to positive identification technologies, such as iris or fingerprint detection, would not such an international data base be a fundamental tool in fighting terrorism. I know that Europol is arguing for just such greater information sharing among EU nations. Last November, a terrorist information common data standards agreement was signed. But to me progress in this area seems too slow.

Allow me to make one last point. I am deeply concerned by the debate in Europe that excoriates the United States' counterterrorism efforts. The European Parliament's "investigation" (a word I have to put in quotes) that was released in February was "unbalanced, inaccurate, and unfair", to quote the State Department's legal advisor. The claims of over 1,250 rendition flights in European airspace is so exaggerated as to be ludicrous, especially when one considers that far less than 100 terrorists have been rendered to other countries in the five-plus years since 2001. The outrage expressed in the press about renditions and alleged torture by CIA interrogators is hard for many of us to understand. Rendition is a long-standing practice, done in cooperation with the governments where the terrorist is located, which pre-dates the attacks of 11 September. The practice has been upheld by European courts. It has served European nations well, such as with the return of Carlos the Jackal and Ocalan to face justice. Those who believe al-Qai'da members' claims of torture while being interrogated would be well-served to read the al-Qai'da training manual that instructs trainees, if captured, to "allege torture or abuse, especially to outside representatives or after release."<sup>12</sup> The manual encourages self-inflicted wounds to "prove" torture. It's a great propaganda tool of al-Qai'da. I am amazed at how gullible those people are who decry American actions,

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<sup>11</sup> DeYoung, Karen; Terror Database Has Quadrupled In Four Years: U.S. Watch Lists Are Drawn From Massive Clearinghouse, Washington Post, Washington Post, Sunday, March 25, 2007; Page A01

<sup>12</sup> Note Sallahudin Amin's claim after his arrest in connection with the 7 July London train bombings.

naively accepting without critical thought the lies of a movement that is anti-freedom in its thinking and seeks the most advanced technologies for mass murder.<sup>13</sup>

Modern terrorism has changed our world – and not for the better. As we hope for a better world for our children, we will be forced to compromise our desire for individual freedoms and privacy to the need for security. This is an uncomfortable trade-off for many of us in the Free World, and it needs to be done carefully within limits. Hopefully, it is temporary. But unless we can resolve (and note that I do not say “win”) the Culture Wars, our future, our children’s futures will not be as we hoped.

Thank you all for listening. Thank you, again, for the invitation to speak here today.

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The Speaker:

Mr. Oleson has been associated with the U.S. Intelligence Community for 40 years. Previously, he served as a senior intelligence policy advisor to two Secretaries of Defense and as assistant director of the Defense Intelligence Agency. He has been a consultant to many of the agencies of the U.S. Intelligence Community and taught management related courses to many of its senior officials. The views he expressed in this talk are his own and do not represent the Government of the United States of America.

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<sup>13</sup> See Pincus, Walter; *CIA Chief Complains About Agency’s Critics in Europe; Hayden Speaks to Foreign Envoys on Anti-Terror Efforts*, Washington Post, April 17, 2007.