

“Ultra-Terrorism” - Are We There Yet?

Tommy Woodall, (tdwooda@sandia.gov)

Dennis Engi, (dengi@sandia.gov)

When the noted author and sociologist, Francis Fukuyama, visited Sandia, he asserted that citizens of the United States do not understand the degree to which we are disliked by many in the world. This is not to say that those who are contemptuous of the United States fail to recognize the great opportunities that exist in our country. They do, however, resent “having their noses rubbed” in our prosperity and power. Given the relative military/technology superiority of the United States, few countries are likely to desire a “toe-to-toe” confrontation. Just imagine yourself as the leader of almost any country (or even the leader of a non-nation-state) and consider taking on a country with stealth aircraft that seem to appear out of nowhere, capable of directing laser-guided bombs down elevator shafts or through windows. Or, suppose you are a relatively young person growing up as the innocent victim of economic sanctions against your country (e.g., Iraq, North Korea, etc.). Responding in kind is out of the question, but respond you must. How and to what end? Terrorism is one answer. Asymmetric/unrestricted warfare (ultra-terrorism) is another.

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Terrorism is the use of force or violence against persons or property in violation of the criminal laws of the United States for purposes of intimidation, coercion or ransom. Terrorists often use threats to create fear among the public, to try to convince citizens that their government is powerless to prevent terrorism, and to get immediate publicity for their causes.

The FBI categorizes terrorism in the United States as one of two types—domestic terrorism or international terrorism. Domestic terrorism involves groups or individuals whose terrorist activities are directed at elements of our government or population without foreign direction. International terrorism involves groups or individuals whose terrorist activities are foreign-based and/or directed by countries or groups outside the United States or whose activities transcend national boundaries.

Terrorist incidents to date in the United States include bombing attacks, involving detonated and undetonated explosive devices, tear gas and pipe and fire bombs, or threats to use these weapons or weapons of mass destruction. The effects of terrorism can vary significantly from loss of life and injuries to property damage and disruptions in services such as electricity, water supply, public transportation and communications.

One way governments attempt to reduce vulnerability to terrorist incidents is by increasing security at airports and other public facilities. Another involves the exercise of response infrastructures/systems to terrorist attacks (i.e., Operation TOPOFF in Colorado and New

Hampshire, and National Capital Region 2000; both conducted in May 2000). However, there is apparently little attention given to a more subtle, yet potentially far more consequential, form of terrorism than bombing facilities and airlines. This form of terrorism would be based on creating an acute, accentuated invidious sentiment among major segments of the citizenry of the United States—in other words, ultra-terrorism. This has the potential to have far reaching, profound effects and—if properly orchestrated—could essentially cause the United States to be unable to provide for the common good of its citizenry, rending the social fabric of our society.

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The destructiveness that people bring on one another has been a subject of intense interest for centuries, indeed, millennia. Although much of the writings on this topic have focused on conflict between warring nations; there has also been an undercurrent of subtle, covert activities that were employed by one person or group against

the enemy. It is clear that if a society perceives that it is being threatened by an external malevolent agent then it is a natural tendency for the society to band together even more closely to fend off the enemy. Therefore, a more effective strategy for a malevolent agent could very well be to cause internal strife among major segments of the citizenry of a nation-state without the citizenry being aware that an external agent is involved. This strategy is much more likely to result in societal fission and thereby achieve the desired end.

Is it possible to construct modern-day scenarios wherein a third party causes the destruction of our society without our society even being aware that it is being manipulated? This class of scenarios is not new. For example, The Greek and Roman epic poems *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, and *The Aeneid* cast “the Gods” in the role of a third party who would cause conflict among mortals. Quite often the mortals were unaware of the role that this third party played. Clearly, there are people in the world today who perceive the United States as the evil empire. Some of these people are undoubtedly aware of the possibility of using the strategy described above. Moreover, some are probably aware that this strategy is more likely to undermine our society than overt acts perceived to be perpetrated by external malevolent agents.

Clearly, there are well-known examples of the disintegration of a nation-state. In the text, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*, Kennedy provides a number of examples of the disintegration of nation-states through “imperialistic overstretch;” i.e., nations projecting their military power according to their economic resources and in defense of their broad economic interests. This form of nation-state behavior might open a vulnerability that could be exploited by an external malevolent agent. However, the work of Schweitzer, *Victory*, is more closely associated with the notion of ultra-terrorism and unrestricted warfare. Schweitzer makes the case that the United States caused the disintegration of the Former Soviet Union by

- technology denial
- introduction of defective technologies
- involvement in Afganistan (akin to “imperialistic overstretch”)
- support of the Polish Solidarity Movement [again, “imperialistic overstretch” by the FSU to counter the Solidarity Movement]
- downward pressure on oil prices (the primary source of revenues to the FSU).

However, this example falls short in that the Soviets were not unaware that the United States was acting in the role of an external malevolent agent. However, could a terrorist or terrorist cell follow this recipe to significantly undermine the United States and its interests?

The real issue is not the overt action that some malevolent agent might take against the nation's critical infrastructures, or even citizens, but rather what might be done to cause major segments of the citizenry of the U.S. to destructively interact with each other. Is it even possible to identify threats, warning signals and potential countermeasures without threatening to destroy the freedoms that we as citizens of the United States hold so dear?