

Great Decisions #2
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Great Decisions Television 2004 Election Year Special
Topic 2: The War Against Terrorism: Do we have the right battle plan?

Male announcer: We're engaged in a war on terror, but have we got the war right, and can we win it? Coming up next on a Great Decisions Special 2004.

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And now, in our New York studio, here is Peter Krogh.

Krogh: On September 11, 2001, the United States was attacked on its continental homeland for the first time since the War of 1812. Guided missiles in the form of hijacked planes piloted by terrorists struck the financial and political capitals of the country. In response, President Bush declared a war on terrorism. Usama Bin Laden, Al Qaeda, and the Taliban in Afghanistan were the first targets. The brutal regime in Iraq was the second. Hovering over the scene and arguably related to terrorism of Mideast origins has been an intensified Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Meanwhile, at home, a Patriot Act was legislated, aimed at countering those looking for America's soft underbelly. Usama Bin Laden is still at large. The campaign in Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq have yet to produce definitive results. The Patriot Act has summoned civil liberties defenders to the barricades, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has escalated. How goes the war on terror? Should it have been a war in the first place? Do we have the right strategy and tactics? Are we going to be living with terrorism forever?

Joining me to discuss these questions are Joe Wilson, former U.S. ambassador, and Bill Maynes, president of the Eurasia Foundation. Gentlemen, welcome to this special edition of Great Decisions 2004. We're now into the third year on a war President Bush declared on terrorism. Normally, in a war, you have an enemy or enemies. Who are the enemies in this war? Joe?

>> Well, let me go back and make a couple points early on. In the 1990s, when we started getting hit with some regularity, there was a bit of reticence on the part of institutional Washington to assign the responsibility for dealing with this to the appropriate institution as the lead actor. Obviously, after 9/11, the military got the handle, as they say. My own view is that after 9/11, it was perfectly appropriate and indeed necessary for the United States to strike out and long past time to address this with the full force of our—

>> Krogh: Who are we striking out at?

>> Well, after 9/11 and indeed during the decade of the '90s, you had the terrorism that was threatening the United States, and the president made it very

clear after 9/11 that our enemy was international terrorism with a global reach. That means Al Qaeda and those who harbored Al Qaeda, which meant that

Afghanistan was indeed necessary and desirable as a first step in the military part of the war on terrorism.

>> Krogh: Bill, whom would you identify as the enemy or enemies? Seems to go beyond Al Qaeda.

>> Yes. At first, we talked about terrorism with a global reach, but then we have been tucking under the category more and more groups. And this raises the question of what a war on terrorism means. Terrorism is a tool, and the tool has been there throughout history. We've had terrorism for centuries. It has been a tactic of the weak against the strong. The United States used it against the British. You know, we didn't come out in full regiments and fight the British. We shot them from behind trees because we were weak. This has been going on-- you know, resistance movements throughout history have used terrorism. It is a tool. The issue is, who are the terrorists who are hostile to the United States? Who are the terrorists who are hostile to the allies of the United States?

>> Krogh: And who are they?

>> And I would argue that if you look at terrorism generally, 90% of it comes from really the Middle East--and by the Middle East, I don't mean just the Arab-Israeli issue; I mean the Kashmir issue and the Chechnya issue. In all three cases, you have peoples that are fighting to try to create a nation, and they are unable to do it, and they have become more and more desperate. And that is the source of most of the terrorism. Now, 9/11 introduced, however, and so did Oklahoma City, a new element that is very critical for us all to understand. In the case of the Palestinian issue or the Kashmiri issue or the Technical issue, we all think we know what the agenda is. What was the agenda of the people who bombed in Oklahoma City? What was Usama Bin Laden's agenda? Now, he actually did list some things, but we are uncertain what the agenda is of this new terrorist breed, which represents, I think, a small minority of what we're facing, but they get support from all of these other groups which do have specific political agendas.

>> Krogh: Is it wise for us to conflate all of this terrorism and put it in the same hopper and then go after it in a big war? Is this the way to go?

>> In my judgment, no. I think it was appropriate to fight the first battle. I think we had no choice but to fight the first battle. But the war on terrorism is something that has to be managed with far more than just military assets. It has to be managed with some specificity as to who the enemy is. And as Churchill said almost 100 years ago, if you hope to avoid another war with the same group, you have to be prepared to address the legitimate grievances of the group that is waging war against you.

>> Krogh: We'll get to that in a moment, but meanwhile, what does the ledger look like on this war against terrorism? Have we got some victories? Have we got some successes? Is there some good news to report?

>> Well, my view is that it's been an absolute disaster. My view is that the invasion of Iraq has been--has played right into Usama Bin Laden's hands. It is a tremendous recruiting tool for him. If you assume that for every terrorist,

you have an infrastructure of sympathizers, of supporters of, say, 100 or even 1,000 to 1, so for every person who's ready to kill you, there's 1,000 who

sympathize with their objectives. And Dick Cheney said there were perhaps 20,000 terrorists who had gone through the Al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan, which gives you a population of supporters and sympathizers of 100 x 20,000 or 1,000 x 20,000, which is a very small percentage of the population of the Muslim world. After this war in Iraq, I think that you have seen just from the international polls that the respect for the United States and affection for the United States in most of these countries--some of these countries--is well below the statistical margin of error, which means that we have grown the population of potential sympathizers and supporters and by extension, disaffected 19-year-old underemployed Arab males who would be terrorists. We've grown those numbers exponentially.

>> Krogh: But Joe and Bill, we haven't had an attack on the homeland since 9/11. We have rounded up some of the Al Qaeda, though not nearly enough. Perhaps we've dispersed them. And we also have Homeland Security apparatus in the making, so can't we report some progress here, Bill?

>> Well, I agree with a lot that Joe said, but I do think there's been some forward progress made. First of all, we have established the principle, which is important, that there cannot be a sanctuary for terrorism as there was for a couple of decades. You'd sit there and know that there were training camps in particular countries that were organizing and training people who were going to carry out hostile acts against you, and nothing could be done, or it was assumed that nothing could be done because of all of the historical precedent of sovereignty and what that meant. You had to, you know, declare war against the country. I think that we made a mistake in Iraq too, but I do think-- because I think it was more of a preventive war than really... a preemptive strike. A preemptive strike is where you know that you're going to be attacked, and you go and attack first. And I don't think anyone would argue that the United States doesn't have that right. In fact, it exists in international law. A preventive war is quite a different thing. That's the kind of mindset that you had before World War I, where a country says, "That country hasn't attacked me. They're not even close to attacking me, but I'm going to attack them because I'm afraid that they're going to get so strong in the next 10 or 15 years that I have to attack them right now." So by saying that we can take preemptive action, I think that was important. We wiped out the bases in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, we haven't followed through with the kind of commitment that I think we need to make Afghanistan truly safe.

>> Krogh: When we've launched this, let us say, preventive war against Iraq, the only visible terrorist in Iraq that I knew about was Saddam Hussein himself. Now we have roving bands of terrorists in Iraq. I mean, it's turned into a camp for suicide bombers, for guerrillas utilizing terrorist tactics.

>> Yeah, I would certainly make the argument that it was not a preventive war in Iraq, that it was a war of choice. A preventive war--you make the point that in 15 years, this country may be strong enough to be an enemy of yours, and Iraq in 2000, 2001, 2002 was clearly a country on the wane. This was not a rising regional power. We had dealt with that issue in '91.

>> Krogh: You had dealt with it, Joe.

>> I had been there. Norman Schwarzkopf had dealt with it more effectively than I had. But it was a war of choice. It distracted attention from the target at

hand, which was Afghanistan and the Taliban. And Afghanistan had become not just this state sponsor of international terror. It had become a terrorist state, and there's a big distinction. They were one and the same. The terrorists ran the country, and they were able to operate freely. There was no way of separating out--and we tried to do this-- the Taliban from Al Qaeda. It had to be done. Certainly it had to be done in the aftermath of 9/11 to go after them. The consequences of it, of course, are, in addition to sort of growing the population from which terrorists might be drawn is, I think you are increasingly seeing that this is becoming sort of a hydra-headed movement. That you hit in Afghanistan, but in hitting in Afghanistan or in Iraq, you see these things popping up everywhere, so you will have the sons of Al Qaeda for the foreseeable future.

>> Krogh: And what has happened in Afghanistan now, Bill? Has it reverted to a sanctuary for a dispersed Al Qaeda or...

>> Well, you're starting to see more and more serious-- You're starting to see more and more serious attacks against U.S. forces. You're starting to see the Taliban reviving in strength. We feel--I think a lot of people feel that there aren't enough troops there, outside troops to help the Afghan government cope with this. The aid has not been at the-- The president talked about creating a Marshall Plan for Afghanistan. We are far short of that. And I think that, probably not for the next five or ten years, but down the road, we will pay for this. We will pay for not having put the resources in there to do the job.

>> Krogh: Let's say that anti-Western extremists are kind of the incubators for terrorism, and that's what we ought to focus on, and what we need to do is win the hearts and minds of the Islamic world. Are our tactics producing that result, or are they producing just the opposite result as we go in with a very muscular, heavy-handed approach?

>> Well, the trends are very bad, and we need to face up to that. There have been polls done on the attitude of Muslim populations, even in friendly countries like Morocco and Jordan and Turkey, and astonishing numbers of people in those countries believe it is legitimate to carry out suicide bombings against the United States. Now, what's happening here is, the Iraqi cause is becoming tied to Arab nationalism. And we obviously have to do something. And the next administration, whether it's Bush or Kerry, is gonna have to find out some way to solve the Iraqi issue so that we can delink that, because it is now a disaster for us. But another aspect of this that I think we have to keep in mind is, you know, as I said, terrorism has been around for centuries. What has not been around is this idea, which hasn't taken place yet but many people are afraid will take place: a union between terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. It is the idea of a group getting ahold of an atomic weapon and placing it in a major city around the world. This is something the previously had been unimaginable. To control that, we have to make sure that we're in charge of the supplies of fissile material around the world. And we've got research laboratories that are poorly guarded and--

>> Krogh: That in itself is a monstrous project.

>> It is, but it has to be done.

>> Graham Allison, Professor Graham Allison at Harvard in a recent book said there are 200 addresses that where nuclear materials are now available.

>> Before 9/11 at MIT, the fissile material was unguarded. Now they've got one Cambridge policeman in front of it.

>> They're tough, those Cambridge policemen.

>> It is a very--it's a very serious problem. And the heart of it is in Russia because they have so much of it, and we need to find ways to get that under control. It's a little better now that Putin is paying the salaries of the soldiers. They actually guard the facilities again. But we have to make sure that we are in control of this fissile material.

>> Krogh: Joe, would you think that would be our highest national security, foreign policy priority?

>> I think it's the most significant issue we face over the next generation of warrior and diplomat, without a doubt. And there a number of things that are already in the books that need to be bolstered. One is [unintelligible] that is consistently underfunded year after year. That's the program to buy up the loose nukes in the former Soviet Union. But in addition to that, it's what makes the war in Iraq on the grounds of w.m.d. that did not exist, and we knew they did not exist, such a travesty because it makes our credibility less.

>> Krogh: Going after real weapons of mass destruction.

>> Next time we have to go and deal with a weapon of mass destruction. If you cry "Wolf" often enough, eventually, people will not listen to you, and it is a very significant and important issue. It is also a reason, of course, why a government should not expose a CIA operative in the clandestine service who's working on weapons of mass destruction issues.

>> Krogh: Thank you, Joe. What would be the country orders of priority in getting at this loose fissile material or potentially loose fissile material? I mean, you'd begin with Russia.

>> Well, Russia's number one, but you have research laboratories all over the world. There are 38 countries, I think, and 120 sites where you have inadequately guarded fissile material. If a terrorist wants to make a nuclear bomb, he can do virtually every element of it except the fissile material. The engineering and cost of that is too high for most of them to do, and so that is the key to controlling that issue. And I would point out, this is not just a question of Islamic terrorism. You know, think of the Unabomber in the United States.

>> Krogh: Do we have to?

>> You know, unfortunately, his quest was to blow the hands off of some professors.

>> Krogh: Yeah, well, I'd be very worried about that, myself.

>> He was technically trained. He was technically trained. Let's say--you know, put yourself 20, 30, 40 years in the future. Someone like that gets his hands on

fissile material, and he decides that he not only wants to take revenge against his professor at Yale; he wants to blow up Yale. I mean, it's a totally different dimension of the problem. And in all societies, you have obdurate, irrational people. They're a very small minority, but they're always there, and we have to make sure that they cannot get their hands on this kind of material.

>> Krogh: What would the two of you say are the root causes of terrorism? The kind of terrorism we face-- anti-Western extremism essentially centered in the Islamic world-- what are the root sources of it? What might we identify as legitimate grievances that we should work on?

>> I think the root source of terrorism, really, since the Spanish fought against Napoleon, has been national existence: trying to make sure the-- kick the occupier out and establish your own sovereignty. And that is what we are facing in the Middle East in three burning cases, and it's very hard to deal with it. I happen to do a lot of work with Russia now. To tell the Russians that they ought to negotiate with the Chechens when 350 children have just been blown up or shot in the back is a very difficult, emotional task to undertake. On the other hand, at some point, there has to be some kind of compromise here, or this will just burn on and burn on.

>> Krogh: And the same thing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

>> Yes, Palestine and Kashmir. And Kashmir.

>> Krogh: Joe?

>> It's the disenfranchisement of people. It's the dysfunctionality of the Middle East. It's the crass exploitation of people's disappointments by people who used religion for political motives. When you listen to Usama Bin Laden talk to the humiliation felt by the Arabs since the expulsion of the Moors from Spain, which was in 1492--

>> Krogh: Or the dismantling of the caliphate by Mustafa Kamal.

>> People who remember-- actually, in Iraq when I was there, people remembered the fall of the caliphate to the Mongols as if it were yesterday. It was in 1258. So there's a lot of exploitation of these sort of historic humiliations that have gone on in the minds of those who would want to remember back that far, to the Crusades. We don't remember who lost the Super Bowl two years ago. They remember who lost the caliphate and how the caliphate was lost in 1258.

>> Krogh: We don't seem to have much sympathy for these people who are looking for their own franchise and their own country. As a matter of fact, the people denying them that have kind of ridden on our antiterrorism coattails so that now our president is tight with Cheron and tight with Putin, both of whom are saying, "Well, we have a serious terrorism problem here, and we're not going to, you know, provide a franchise for the regions from which it's emanating."

>> Well, as I was indicating, the problem is, when outrageous tactics are used, it is difficult not to be sympathetic with the country that has been the victim of these attacks, and that is our attitude when this happens in Israel or when

it happens in India or when it happens in Russia. Right now, the Russian embassy in Washington is banked with flowers from ordinary Americans who've gone to show their sympathy, and that's a perfectly normal and healthy human reaction. But if

you want to say, "What is driving this?" It is the humiliation that comes from occupation.

>> Krogh: So if we had spent the, let us say, \$200 billion that we're spending on this preventive war in Iraq on improving the life chances of people in impoverished areas and those who are under occupation, would we be further ahead in the war on terrorism, do you think, Joe?

>> Well, having worked with USAID and other international development organizations over the years, nation building and democratization--all the things we lump together as soft power--is tough sledding. It takes a lot of time, a lot of patience, a lot of tenacity, and you have to be prepared to deal with a lot of failure, and it's difficult to sustain the political will for these sorts of programs. They're not sexy. It is not the U.S. Marine Corps driving up the Tigris and Euphrates River valleys in their Abrams tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles. But yes. When we did the Bosnia operation, I was political advisor to the commander in chief of the U.S. Armed Forces there, and one of the first things we did in the planning phase was come to grips with what you do after you've separated the belligerents. And the first thing, of course, is, you try and make life better for the 90% of the population that just wants to get on with their lives-- doesn't want to be part of any war, doesn't want to resist, just wants to plant their crops and harvest them and raise their families. We, of course, did not do that in Afghanistan. Instead, Afghanistan has declined into sort of a new era of warlordism amply funded by a \$1 billion or \$2 billion opium crop and a president who literally does not assert control-- exert control over his own capital city. And you magnify that by what we see in Iraq, and you can see where this is headed.

>> Krogh: Do we need to reorganize our government to wage a more effective war against terrorism, Bill?

>> Well, I think the big problem with American foreign policy for many years now-- it's not just in this administration; it goes back a couple of decades-- is, we're over-militarized. You know, all of our resources are there. A couple of years ago, the Washington Post did a story about our military commanders who control the various regions around the world, and you know, they are major political figures in their region.

>> Krogh: Kind of proconsuls.

>> Yeah, they're proconsuls. They're proconsuls. And it isn't--it isn't that they are behaving improperly, in most cases. They're very admirable people that we've sent out there. It's that they have all these resources. And the resources are all military, so the ties tend to become military to military. And we are dramatically under funded in the other areas, and it is--it is hurting us. There's no question about it.

>> Krogh: Joe, if you were president and in charge of counterterrorism, what would be the one thing--we're almost out of time here--but what would be the one thing that you would do differently?

>> Well, I think the most important thing that we need to do is, we need to reassert ourselves as international leaders, and that means that you have to go out and elicit the support of followers because without followers, you're not a leader. You cannot do this unilaterally. We have seen--in fact, I would argue that the invasion of Iraq has shown our weakness much more than our strength,

and we need the international community as much as the international community needs us. And we need to reach out to them and develop the international relationships that are necessary to bring a coordination into this fight.

>> Krogh: Thank you, Joe Wilson, Bill Maynes, and you, our audience, for this special edition of Great Decisions 2004. I'm Peter Krogh.

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