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Eric Schmitt

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REMARKS ON COUNTERSTRIKE*

*Eric Schmitt***

I am going to start by speaking for a few minutes about why Thom Shanker and I wrote *Counterstrike*[1], the book we have been working on for a little over three years. I had returned to *The New York Times* after a fellowship at Stanford University. Thom and I had been colleagues covering the Pentagon for many years and we were reunited in our new beats—mine covering terrorism and Thom covering the Pentagon. One of the first stories we worked on together, in March 2008, was a piece that looked at changes in the way the U.S. government was combating terrorism generally, and combating Al Qaeda specifically. As we went around to do our initial interviews with officials at the White House, the State Department and the Pentagon, each person said essentially the same thing: to understand where the country is today, to understand how far we have come in this fight and how far we still have to go, you have to think back to where we were on September 11, 2001.

Within that framework, we went back and talked to our sources and as we explored that theme, two arches to the narrative came forward. The first was how little the U.S. government knew

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** Senior writer, *The New York Times*. His coverage focuses on terrorism and national security issues. Mr. Schmitt has shared two Pulitzer Prizes, awarded in 1999 and 2009.

[1] ERIC SCHMITT & THOM SHANKER, COUNTERSTRIKE: THE UNTOLD STORY OF AMERICA'S SECRET CAMPAIGN AGAINST AL QAEDA (2011).

about Al Qaeda, and about terrorist organizations in general, on September 11, 2001. Most government officials viewed terrorism as something that happened overseas. To be sure, there were specialty niches, people in the CIA, people in the Pentagon, people in the F.B.I. who had studied this and had even studied Al Qaeda. And of course, earlier terrorist attacks included the bombing of the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut in 1983, the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, and the bombing of the U.S.S. *Cole* destroyer that was in Aden harbor in Yemen in 2000. Yet, it was not a priority for the U.S. government. Nor was it a priority for the new administration of President George W. Bush.

There were other things on President Bush's plate. In particular, China and missile defense dominated the early days of his first term. So much so, that officials who were in the White House on 9/11 told us that by that afternoon, as it became clear that Al Qaeda was the organization most likely responsible, senior level people in the White House were asking each other "Al who is responsible for that attack?" That was the level of understanding—or lack of understanding—at the time of the attacks. What we try to do in the book is follow the evolution over the ten-year period following the attacks, and track how the understanding of Al Qaeda and of terrorist organizations becomes much more nuanced.

The other arch that we explore is the response to 9/11 itself, and understandably the response was an emotional one. It was one of using the military might the U.S. had combined with the intelligence community. It involved putting, initially, a small number of U.S. forces on the ground in Afghanistan to fight with the Northern Alliance against the Taliban government that was hosting Al Qaeda. It involved killing and capturing as many of the Al Qaeda fighters and commanders as possible, and driving them out of Afghanistan.

The problem with this approach was that it focused only on the idea that the enemy will collapse if you kill or capture as many of these fighters and commanders as you can. Essentially, the idea was to kill and capture your way to victory. It did not work. It did not work at all. This became increasingly noticeable as the fight pivoted from Afghanistan and the tribal areas of Pakistan to Iraq.

But it is not until October 2003, when then Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld pens a very important memo to about half a dozen of his civilian and military aides, that the strategy's failings become more widely acknowledged.[2] (Now at this point we have to remind our editors in New York that just because Don Rumsfeld said it does not make it automatically wrong). What Rumsfeld did in this memo is something important. Remember this is October of 2003—the insurgency in Iraq is really taking hold, guerrillas are fighting there and U.S. commanders on the ground are sending reports to Washington complaining about what is happening. So what Rumsfeld asks in this memo is this fundamental question: Is our strategy creating more militants than we're taking off the battlefield? And if the answer is yes, then the U.S. needs to change its strategy and operations to be able to confront an enemy that has proven much more resilient and much more adaptive than we ever gave it credit for.

So that is the second arch we follow in the book: how the U.S. government goes from what was a knee-jerk kill/capture mentality focused on a handful of fighters to a much more holistic approach to fighting terrorism. What do I mean by that? What I mean is that the new mentality adopts a whole of government approach. To be sure, the military, the C.I.A. and the rest of the intelligence community continue to play leading roles in combating terrorism (there is no better example of this than the May 2011 raid in Abbottabad, Pakistan that killed Osama bin Laden), but in the intervening years we have seen the growing involvement of other agencies. The State Department and its diplomats now are paying much more attention in their postings to the root causes of terrorism, and are trying to work with local governments and local organizations to address it. The F.B.I., which has been transformed into the country's primary domestic counterterrorism agency, sends scores of agents overseas to work with their foreign law enforcement partners. The Treasury Department now is the lead American agency in tracking and stamping out the financing of terrorist networks (such as the Taliban and Al Qaeda). This approach did not exist prior to 9/11. The internal cooperation among these different governmental

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[2] *See also* SCHMITT & SHANKER at 44 (describing leaked memorandum).

organizations has improved greatly, although it is not perfect by any means. Finally, the cooperation with international allies of all sorts also has grown. To fight Al Qaeda is to fight a transnational foe that does not recognize international boundaries and so you have to be able to work with allied partners in order to combat it fully.

So that's the broad outline of the story.

As the U.S. government developed a more nuanced understanding of Al Qaeda generally, and of Al Qaeda as a terrorist organization, it became clear that it was a network made up of different pieces. You can think of Al Qaeda as Al Qaeda, Inc. It's a company, if you will. It has its own HR department. It's a department that goes out and recruits fighters, and figures out who is going to be the best suicide bomber. It's got a real estate department that figures out where to locate safe houses and where to hide all these people as they funnel in or around places in Iraq or Afghanistan. It's got a financing department that figures out how to finance the operations of Al Qaeda networks, and how to buy the explosives and move things around. Some of these networks are more susceptible to attack than others; this was one of the important lessons the U.S. government learned over the last ten years.

Returning to Secretary Rumsfeld's question, we start to see a new kind of thinking in the Pentagon. One thing we talk about in the book is an interesting change in thinking on how to attack terrorist networks outside of the use of direct military action. Our story moves forward into the summer of 2005 where there is some interesting thinking going on inside the bowels of the Pentagon about how you go after terrorists. The book focuses on two characters in the Pentagon. The first is a Hollywood handsome young man named Matthew Kroenig, a graduate student from U.C. Berkeley who is spending the summer as an intern at the C.I.A., and is detailed for the second half of his summer to the Pentagon's policy shop, which happens to be working in a number of areas involving deterrence. Kroenig is teamed up with a veteran of the Cold War by the name of Barry Pavel. Pavel has been there for years working on classical war deterrence. The two of them, and other colleagues, start exploring a really interesting theme, or question really, that turns into a theme: are there elements of classic Cold War deterrence, the strategy that

kept a tense peace for decades between the Soviet Union and the U.S., that can be updated and adapted to fighting terrorists? And specifically, to fighting Al Qaeda?

Well, as they start doing their work and they start shopping their ideas around the Pentagon, they meet all sorts of criticism and resistance. People scoff at the idea. If you think about Cold War deterrence, it was based on the idea of the U.S. being able to hold at risk things that the Soviet Union held dear: physical things, government buildings, military bases, places with addresses that missiles could strike in the time of war. And obviously the Soviets had similar a list of potential targets in the U.S. So, the critics questioned how any of the elements of deterrence could be used against Al Qaeda when Al Qaeda is a transnational organization, and when Al Qaeda does not value or own physical things that can be targeted. It does not have an address somewhere in downtown Kabul that can be attacked.

This is where the interesting research comes in. As Pavel and Kroenig studied the interviews being done with prisoners, it turned out that Al Qaeda terrorists did value things. They were not physical things but virtual values; things like honor and prestige and their status within the ummah, the Muslim public, and their prospects for success. So this starts percolating. How should the U.S. government think about using elements of Cold War deterrence to target the terrorist networks themselves?

So Rumsfeld gets very excited about this. This gets him all energized because this is outside the box thinking, and he has timed it perfectly. In the late summer of 2005, he takes a trip down to the ranch in Crawford, Texas. He meets with President Bush and they go over all sorts of major national security issues. In Rumsfeld's battered leather briefcase is the Power Point briefing from Kroenig and company on how the U.S. might go about using Cold War deterrence theory to combat Al Qaeda. The problem is George W. Bush is the war on terrorism president. He is not some kind of namby-pamby deterrence president. So he is very skeptical of this approach, and as Rumsfeld lays this out at the ranch, he can tell W ain't buying it. The president is skeptical.

But there is somebody else in the room that day that plays an interesting, perhaps a pivotal role in this, and it is Marine Corps General James Cartwright, who at the time was the head of U.S. Strategic Command (the command that controls the entire nuclear arsenal for the U.S.). Cartwright goes on to become vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. As Rumsfeld finishes his presentation, Bush turns to Cartwright using his call sign and marine rank and asks something like, "Hoss, do you believe any of this stuff that Rummy is pitching to me, this deterrence stuff? Is there anything to it?" And Cartwright responds by saying something like, "I'm not here to talk about the project they're working on but I am here to talk about something that you care very deeply about, missile defense. And if you think about it, many of the things that we're trying to do in the missile defense program—a limited system of interceptors, missiles based on the west coast of the U.S. and Alaska that can shoot down a limited number of missiles from a rogue state like North Korea—are a form of deterrence—the idea that you can shoot down a limited number may give the enemy pause to try to do it. So we are working from similar pages here, the same book: how to use deterrence against an adversary, only I'm looking against the nation state and Rumsfeld is talking to you about something different, about a transnational threat."[3]

At that moment something very important happens because now things are starting to crystallize at the policy levels of government in 2005. The idea is gaining credibility, and starts to find its way into policy documents, and from there commanders on the ground can start taking heed of it.

Well, that brings us to the next question. Obviously it is great to have all this written down in fancy policy papers, and even to have Bush basically approve it as part of a larger document. But, what impact is it going to have on the ground? Because what the commanders are facing on the ground in 2005 and 2006 are insurgents, in places like Iraq and even Afghanistan. So, we talk in our book about a number of examples where this policy starts to

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[3] *See generally* SCHMITT & SHANKER at 55 (describing Cartwright's conversation with President Bush).

filter down and starts to be carried out on the ground. Let me tell you about three of them.

The first has to do with the Taliban. In Nangarhar province, a part of eastern Afghanistan, the Taliban is running a very effective campaign attacking coalition forces and it is largely doing it because it has a very efficient financial network. It allows them to buy the supplies they need, and the explosives they need. It allows them to pay off the insurgents and their families. It is a very smooth running operation. It is done through an ancient system of money exchange called *hawalas*, which have been around for centuries.[4] Basically, it is a system of moving money around without any kind of electronic system tracing it, or anything else that western law enforcement can use. A cousin leaves money with a family-run business in Kabul, and the money makes it way to Kandahar without ever entering the banking system. It makes it very difficult for U.S. or western law enforcement to follow. One of the most pressing challenges facing U.S. forces in 2005 was how to get at this type of financing system.

So what the U.S. commanders in Afghanistan, working with their Afghan allies, decide is this: they go into Nangarhar province where there are some 300 of these family-run businesses, and they shut down six. They then turn to the rest, and in their best Sopranos imitation, say something like, "Nice house you've got there, nice garden that goes with that house, nice lifestyle you have there for your children and your grandchildren. It would be a real shame if all of that went away because we know you have a legitimate business that you conduct, but we also know that you do business with the Taliban. If you continue to do business with the Taliban, we will shut you down just like we've shut down your neighbors and you will be out of business completely.

Well, think back to that network. The commanders found a weak link in the network, because the *hawalas* decided they would rather protect their pocketbook than the ideology of the Taliban.

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[4] *See id.* at 183-84 (explaining the system of *hawalas*, the money transfer houses that operate throughout the Muslim world and are based on honor, trust and confidentiality).

Suddenly the Taliban could not get any credit. The leaders could not move their money through this system because the *hawalas* would not do business with them. Operations were disjointed, and shut down in some cases in Nangarhar province—all because the financing system was shut down. (Note to self: if you are an intelligence analyst, there are ways other than bombs and bullets to take down a terrorist network).

The second example of the deterrence strategy on the ground is in Iraq. This is a little bit later in 2006 and 2007, when the sectarian violence is taking off and a major component of this shift is the increase in the number of suicide bombers coming in from outside the country. Young men are being recruited from all over the Middle East and North Africa. They are being funneled in through Syria in what the military calls "the rat line."[5] They come down through western Iraq and into Anbar Province where they are strapped into suicide vests and they carry out their bombings throughout the capital city, effectively undermining the legitimacy and credibility of the Iraqi government. The initial American approach was to pick off each and every one of these young men as they come in, and to stop them before they were able to carry out this violence. This proved too hard. It proved too hard because there was an insatiable supply of young men willing to commit the ultimate sacrifice for the cause. The flow continued.

So in late 2007, the U.S. commanders on the ground started looking at the problem in a different way, through the deterrence lens. It turned out the suicide bomber network had a very important link: before any of these young men would carry out the bombings, they required that a *sharia emir*, or holy man, give them a blessing to guide them to the next world. This was very important to the recruits because it guaranteed they would get the benefits of blowing themselves up: the virgins in heaven, the payments for their family,

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[5] *See generally id.* at 77 (explaining that Sinjar was the "hub for key Al Qaeda smuggling route, or 'ratline', that brought fighters–especially suicide bombers–into Iraq."). *See also* Dina Temple-Raston, *Officials Look for Signs of Al-Qaida Surge in Syria*, NPR.ORG (Mar. 1., 2012), http://www.npr.org/2012/03/01/147683908/officials-look-for-signs-of-al-qaida-surge-in-syria (discussing the Syrian rat line).

and all other benefits that go with being a suicide bomber. So the Americans, working with Iraqi allies, began killing and capturing the emirs. Suddenly, without the involvement of the religious leader, the bombers balked. They would not go forward with the kind of attacks that Al Qaeda wanted them to do. It slowed down the attacks. It deterred some of them. Some of the recruits left and went home. They had second thoughts about it, and they were not as committed as they initially thought.

The third example of deterrence theory as applied on the ground goes back to Afghanistan. In southern Afghanistan, there is a particular cell that is carrying out all sorts of attacks against the U.S. and Coalition forces. The attacks include small arms attacks, IEDs, and roadside bombings. Casualties are piling up on the allied side. The Americans are particularly interested in taking out the leader of this cell, a guy we call Ahmad. The problem is Ahmad is very smart. He does not appear in public very much. He does not use his cell phone. He uses couriers and messengers to get his orders out. In sum, he is very hard to detect. So the Americans do something they figure has worked in other places: they put a bounty on his head, figuring that would be incentive enough for people to turn him in. It does not work. It does not work because the villagers are scared to death of what happens if it is discovered that they ratted him out. And others secretly sympathize with what Ahmad is doing. They don't like the Americans in their country, and they quietly cheer for Ahmad. An increase in the bounty offered does no good. The attacks keep rising.

The deterrence theory is trickling down through the military and the U.S. commanders are talking about how to counter terrorist networks using deterrent capabilities. They are focusing on the idea of virtual values. What virtual values does Ahmad have? What can be exploited? Instead of raising the bounty on Ahmad's head, they lower the bounty and then start spreading the word, using their surrogates in the marketplaces, that Ahmad is not the terrorist leader he used to be. After all when was the last time you saw him? They say that his fighters are defecting to other networks because Ahmad is not in control anymore. Ahmad has lost a little off his fast ball, if you know what I mean. Word is spreading throughout the community that Ahmad has lost his edge.

Well, you can imagine who is sitting in his hole somewhere hearing all of this. Ahmad. He is none too pleased. He is pissed off that the Americans are spreading this vicious propaganda against him. After all, his attacks are actually on the rise. His attacks are working. What is going on here? He is outraged. He is so outraged that he gets on his cell phone and starts calling his lieutenants to make sure nobody is defecting, to make sure nobody is believing this stuff. Well, this is exactly what the Americans hoped he would do because it plays right in to one of America's strengths. It was one of the government's strengths before the 9/11 attacks, and has continued to be a strength throughout the counterterrorism campaign since 9/11: the increasing capability of American technology to suck up all kinds of electronic communications, including cell phone conversations, emails, and anything that is sold with electronics. And this is exactly what the Americans did. They were able to track and locate not only Ahmad but the half dozen other lieutenants that he called. This is yet another example of how the U.S. does not need to kill with bullets and bombs to wrap these guys up.

This gets us to a discussion of what is one of the frontiers of counterterrorism: the world of cyberspace. After all, cyberspace is oftentimes where terrorists do much of their recruiting—and much of their recruiting for money and financing. And in many ways, it is where they do a lot of operational recruiting and planning. In many cases, these young guys go to these online war games sites, and they use the same vernacular as teenage gamers in the U.S. or anywhere else in the world use—except that they have attached special code words to that vernacular that mean something only to some players. The games allow the networks to plot attacks using these simulator games in a way that is very hard for the National Security Agency and other intelligence agencies to detect.

The Americans are making breakthroughs in this; in the past few years, American analysts began to hack into the cell phones of terrorist leaders. Once in, they use the phones to disseminate false and confusing messages to their fighters. Arabic speaking analysts are able to go into Jihad chat rooms and often do nothing more than ask provocative questions. They may ask, "why is it, dear brother, that we are supporting these attacks that we've seen against wedding parties in Jordan that are killing dozens if not scores of men, women and

children, Muslim civilians?" (who happen to be most of the victims in Al Qaeda's attacks). Or they may ask, "how is it that this small fringe group has hijacked this great religion?" The whole purpose of this approach is to instill doubt and confusion among people who are fence sitters (particularly young women who are trying this out for size), and dissuade them from going into the organization or maybe get them out of the organization or movement all together. Finally, you have instances where intelligence analysts have been able to forge the online watermarks of Al Qaeda. You can imagine the mayhem U.S. officials have been able to cause by sending out false and contradictory messages under the Al Qaeda signature.

So, far what I've talked about are the successes of this counterterrorism campaign. To be sure, even the areas of success have a long way to go as we continue to refine the way we look at the threat as it morphs over time.

One of the areas where it has been a real challenge for the U.S. and its allies, however, is getting at the root causes of terrorism, and developing a counter messaging campaign that gets at the reasons terrorists become terrorists in the first place. Part of the problem here is that Al Qaeda, despite its diminished capability in places like the Pakistani frontier, still has a very strong message. It is a message with resilience and it is simple. It basically says the U.S. and the West are at war with Islam. It's a false notion. It's totally bogus. But it has traction on the Muslim street because all the Al Qaeda guys have to do is point to the tens of thousands of troops the U.S. had in Iraq until just last December, the tens of thousands of troops the U.S. and its allies have in Afghanistan and will continue to have at least through 2014, and the continued support the U.S. has for Israel in Middle East geopolitics. This is the gist, the thing that takes hold on the Muslim street.

The U.S. government's message, even when developed by people like Margaret Tutwiler and Karen Hughes with backgrounds in Madison Avenue advertising and political campaigns, fell on deaf ears. And that is because the American government has no credibility on the Muslim street.

The U.S. is now trying—and it is very difficult to do—to amplify the voices of credible Muslim allies and other religious figures who are brave enough to stand up to the insurgents, who are brave enough to stand up against the death threats that Al Qaeda issues against these people and denounce them. By using the same religious authority that undergirds the Al Qaeda narrative, the U.S. hopes to strike these guys down. It is very difficult and it is a long-running battle and it is only now that we are starting to see the effects of this on the ground. The realization that the bombings Al Qaeda has carried out are killing mostly civilians is starting to take hold in people's minds.

What I want to do now is read a little bit from a section of our book because it speaks to this point of how the Americans are in some cases able to capitalize on opportunities that come their way when a credible Muslim voice presents itself as someone who can be used—not by the Americans in an overt way—but by Afghans or Iraqis or Pakistanis as their voice against this kind of extremism. In order to set this up a bit, I should explain that this passage is about a campaign that was launched in northern Iraq in late 2007 and early 2008 by three-star U.S. Army General Mark Hertling. Hertling was trying to combat a network of female suicide bombers. Many of these young women were the widows of the male suicide bombers I talked about earlier, and they posed a much different and perhaps more difficult challenge for the American forces in northern Iraq because of the access that women have and the relative scarcity of female troops. So here is what happened when Hertling's troops came upon something.

> An unexpected breakthrough in Hertling's effort came when Rania, a fifteen-year old girl, was captured in Diyala before her explosive vest could be detonated. She told interrogators that she had been given juice that made her queasy and dizzy and that she was wrapped in the vest before being pushed toward a checkpoint. Rania said that her mother was an Al Qaeda sympathizer. The debriefing enabled the Americans and Iraqis to gain a better understanding of how at least some of these women were recruited, and her information led to the further capture of six

> other women in the same cell, all widows of Al Qaeda fighters who were primed as suicide bombers. American commanders wanted to spread the word that Rania and others appeared not to have been willing bombers and that the killing of innocent Iraqis could not be defended as an approved religious act. But that had to be done without American fingerprints, which could undermine the message. American officers convened sessions with Iraqi politicians, human rights activists, and journalists, and provided information about the suicide bombers, including specific and significant details of Rania's debriefing. They wanted this information to promote a public debate, but unlike in the early years of the war—when the American military wrote and produced information campaigns and even paid off local reporters – the content of this discussion was left to the Iraqis.
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> The Iraqi news media leapt on the story. A young female radio host initiated a call-in show outside Baqubah, where Rania was captured, and called the program 'Doves of Peace.' The discussions of Rania's case became the most popular talk show on regional radio, and the host became an Iraqi wartime Oprah. By the time the 1st Armored Division turned over command of northern Iraq to Iraqi forces as part of the reduction of American troops across the country, instances of female suicide bombers in the region had dropped significantly, although the threat has not disappeared.[6]

So when Thom Shanker and I went to speak with General Hertling about this, we said, "you know, General, this seems like a perfect example of winning hearts and minds." Hertling, who has been around a long time, said, "Oh, God, guys, don't use that term, please." In part because of the echoes of Vietnam no doubt. But here

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[6] SCHMITT & SHANKER at 203-204.

is what Hertling had to say that was even more important. He said, "What we're trying to do here is not trying to win hearts and minds of these people—that's kind of a demeaning concept really. What we're trying to do is win their trust and respect. That is the long-term goal here and if we can do that, if we can bring people on board knowing we have their trust and respect, then we can cement a much more enduring relationship in fighting this kind of extremism even after we're gone."

So, where are we in this campaign, more than ten years after the initial attacks of 9/11? Well, I think there is probably some good news and some not so good news. The good news is that of the guys who organized the 9/11 campaign, most of them are either dead or captured. The number of senior Al Qaeda leaders in the Pakistani tribal areas is down to 2 or 3 according to the U.S. intelligence community. That is not to say they are not dangerous because they are. They are still plotting attacks, they are still trying to get their hands on weapons of mass destruction, most likely radiological material; and they are still providing some semblance of leadership. But with Osama bin Laden's death, they have been greatly degraded in their ability to conceive and execute plots to attack the American homeland.

Here is the not so good news though. In the intervening ten years, there have been regional affiliates that have grown up. Remember this is Al Qaeda, Inc. Its franchises have grown up, and each one of them with a regional flavor and angle. There is one in Northern Africa, one in Algeria, one in Mali, one in Mauritania (that seems to be cooperating increasingly with yet another organization called Boko Haram in Nigeria), and also Al Qaeda in East Africa (the remnants of it in Kenya working with al Shabaab in Somalia). Each is quite dangerous. In addition, there is a resurgent Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which had been pretty much decimated after the surge in Iraq in 2007. But with the withdrawal of American forces, the organization is making a comeback, not only in Iraq but perhaps more threateningly in Syria. There are reports, credible reports, that they may be behind some of the major bombings of security targets in Damascus. Finally, there is the most vexing of these franchises: the one in Yemen formerly called Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). This is the organization that was responsible for the so-

called under pants bomber, the young Nigerian man who tried to blow himself up over Detroit on Christmas Day a couple of years ago. This is the same group that ten months later packed explosives into printer cartridges, and placed them on cargo planes routed through Europe and bound for the U.S. Were it not for some timely intelligence help from Saudi Arabia, that could have been a catastrophic attack as well. So you have these franchises that are causing problems.

Here in the U.S. there is a growing concern about what we call homegrown terrorists. They come in two flavors. The first is young men, either citizens or residents, who have trained overseas in the Pakistani tribal areas or in Yemen. These are people like Faisal Shahzad, the young man who tried to blow up an SUV full of explosives in Times Square a couple of years ago. This guy seemed to have everything going for him: he was a young Pakistani-American, a financial analyst for Elizabeth Arden, lived in the suburbs of Connecticut, married with two kids. And yet as he returned home from his periodic visits to Pakistan and visited his neighbors and friends in the tribal areas, he became more and more radicalized, more and more incensed about the drone attacks being carried out there, and more and more incensed by American support for Israel—to such an extent that he undertook his bomb attack.

You also have individuals who in the privacy of their own homes watch English language Jihad videos produced by a guy named Anwar al-Awlaki. Al-Awlaki, who until he was killed in a drone strike in Yemen last year, was probably Al Qaeda's chief propagandist. He spoke perfect English, was American-born, preached in mosques in northern Virginia and San Diego, California, and yet went over to Yemen to become not only a propagandist but also one of the organization's major operational planners. He worked closely with Samir Khan, the editor of an online magazine, who also was killed in that drone strike. The franchises have grown and become more decentralized. As the main Al Qaeda threat in Pakistan has been diminished, the homegrown threat looms. It's all out there.

That is why one of the major conclusions that Thom and I reach at the end of our book is this: there will be another attack against the U.S. We can't say when or how, but the attack is coming.

Up until now, the U.S. has been very good, and pretty lucky. Unfortunately, the terrorists only have to be lucky and good every once in a while for there to be an attack.

In one of our last interviews with outgoing Defense Secretary Robert Gates, he talked about how terrorist organizations think today. They are shifting their focus from the large-scale attacks of the 9/11 model to throwing pebbles into the spokes of the western economy. For example, Al Qaeda has bragged about the fact that the printer cartridge plot cost only $4,200 to carry out and yet its impact was to shut down international air and cargo travel for several days and force the West to spend tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars to safeguard the system. Al Qaeda will take that deal any day. And they will start to claim credit for the economic downturn that the West is facing. So you have some who are still planning for the big attack but many more are looking for the disruptive attack.

The other critique we have in the book is that government leaders, starting with the president and all the way down to the community level, have not done enough to instill a sense of resilience in the American public. By that we do not mean a physical resilience. We know that Americans recover from natural disasters. We know, after watching a ceremony at Ground Zero last September 11, that Americans are very good at building back up what the terrorists tear down. What we are talking about instead is psychological resilience. The same kind of resilience the Israelis have, that the Brits have, and that many other European countries have that have gone through their own domestic terrorism in the past. This is a lesson we can borrow from these countries. They mourn their dead, clean up the debris, and move on. They do not overreact. They do not give the terrorists the satisfaction of overreacting, which is in many ways what happened in the U.S. after 9/11.

We did not understand the threat. We did not know what was coming next. So we overreacted, both overseas and domestically. It is incumbent upon our leaders to tackle this problem. To President Obama's credit, he has tried. He used the R word on the last anniversary of 9/11—resiliency. But it is a hard message to hear. What he is saying is: suck it up; we're going to get attacked. It's too

bad if you don't like it. It is not a very good message to have to deliver in a presidential election year.

And that's the problem. The political environment is currently so polarized, so politically charged that it is hard to have this kind of conversation. But having this difficult conversation is the only substitute for going through this again. We must have this conversation over and over again—at the national level, the state level and at the community level—to reinforce the idea that although we are under attack, we have learned what the threat is. The threat is not ten-feet tall. The threat is not an existential threat, like the Cold War, despite the impression left initially by the Bush Administration. This is not an enemy that we can wipe off the face of the earth with a thermonuclear exchange. We did not understand this in the initial days after 9/11. We do now and we have to remember that, and keep moving forward.