
The Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press,
Politics and Public Policy

Working Paper Series

While America Slept:
Coverage of Terrorism from 1993 to September 11, 2001

By Matthew V. Storin
Shorenstein Fellow, Spring 2002
Former Editor, *The Boston Globe*
Associate Vice President, News and Information
University of Notre Dame

#2002-7

Copyright © 2002, President and Fellows of Harvard College
All rights reserved



Introduction

So far as is known, the traumatic attacks of September 11, 2001, were not foreseen by U.S. intelligence services, and they certainly were not predicted in the media. Yes, some government commissions warned of terrorist attacks within American borders sometime in the future. But the events of 9/11 shocked virtually all Americans, including the President of the United States. So it is useful to consider whether American news outlets utterly failed to prepare the public for this trauma, or raised at least some flags of caution. To date, there has been almost no detailed study that could answer this question. This paper attempts to do so.

I.

Methodology

The research spans an eight-and-a-half-year period from the bombing of the World Trade Center on February 26, 1993, through the coverage of September 10, 2001, concentrating on *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. The stretch of time being studied required the limitation to the two American newspapers that arguably devote the most resources to the coverage of public policy at home and abroad. But I made this limitation reluctantly. As the former editor of a large regional newspaper, *The Boston Globe*, I am well aware that much good work is done by other top newspapers and there is an inordinate amount of attention given to these leading papers by analysts of American media. Time constraints also prevented me from considering televised coverage. But, while most Americans get their news from television, it is well understood that the vast majority of such coverage as the networks might undertake in

international news is greatly influenced by what appears in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

As for the time period chosen, the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, though it resulted in relatively few casualties, was a dramatic signal that terrorism would no longer be something that happened to other people, other nations. So it seemed a logical point at which to begin the study.

I set out to evaluate content published in the *Times* and *Post*, including on the editorial and OpEd pages, that would meet either of two criteria:

1. The published information would help a reader understand that there was a realistic and perhaps likely threat of a major terrorist attack by Islamic militants against a target within American borders.

2. The published information would help a reader understand that attitudes toward the U.S. within the Islamic world were often hostile and, at the extremes, very dangerous and violent.

I reviewed more than 2,300 news stories, editorials, commentaries and even letters to the editor in this pursuit, using Lexis-Nexis and Dow Jones Interactive search systems, utilizing such key words as terrorist, terrorism, anti-American, threat, bombing, anti-terrorism, Islam, jihad, Muslim, and, certain proper nouns such as Hart and Rudman (for former Sens. Gary Hart and Warren Rudman, cochairs of an important commission on national security.) Hundreds of other stories were searched out solely for statistical

purposes, e.g. the frequency with which Osama bin Laden merited front page mention. The organization of the paper is chronological, with sections devoted to key events and the coverage that followed.

For two years of the study period, a smaller paper, *The Tampa Tribune*, (September, 2001, circulation 242,938) was evaluated to compare the “trickle down” results as reflected in a paper that generally would do no original reporting on policy issues at the international or national level. Also, I searched for books, magazine articles and unclassified government reports that indicated the level of intensity in addressing the terrorist threat and the underlying attitudes of the Islamic world outside the realm of journalism.

II.

Summary of findings

The research led to these findings:

- The glaring weakness of both newspapers was their inattention to the underlying causes of terrorism and scant coverage of frustrations within the Islamic world, including opinion or analysis pieces that prompt debate
- Generally, the newspapers did solid reporting on the growing threat of international terrorism against targets within American borders, though it was done inconsistently, and without ever elevating the story to levels of urgency achieved by some other contemporaneous issues, e.g. security at the Los Alamos Nuclear Center in New Mexico.
- An article in *The Columbia Journalism Review* (November-December, 2001) arguing that the media “missed” the story of the terrorism threat

was misleading, particularly regarding *The New York Times*, which it singled out for criticism.

Key Dates

Feb. 26, 1993 --- bombing of WTC

June 27, 1993 – missile attack on Baghdad

March 20, 1995 – Japanese cult, Aum Shinrikyo, stages chemical attack on Tokyo subways. Later in '95 Iraq revealed it had built a large biological warfare arsenal and had contemplated using it during the Gulf War.

April 19, 1995 – Oklahoma City blast

June 25, 1996 – bombing of Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia near Dharam, killing 19 U.S. soldiers.

July 17, 1996 -- TWA 800 crashes, killing 210 passengers and 18 crew, and creating suspicions of terrorism that were never proved.

July 27, 1996 – bomb goes off at Olympics in Atlanta. Post-midnight blast in Centennial Park kills one and injures more than 100.

August 7, 1998 – bombing of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania

August 21, 1998 – U.S. launches Cruise missile attacks against suspected terrorist camp in Afghanistan and suspected chemical weapons plant in Sudan.

December 17, 1998 – U.S. begins bombing raids against Iraq

October 12, 2000 – attack against the U.S.S. Cole in the port of Aden, Yemen, killing 17 American sailors

Findings

I.

February 26, 1993: the bombing of the World Trade Center

The bomb that exploded in the parking garage of the twin towers killed five and brought the horror of terrorism to the U.S. Coverage was massive and dramatic. As might be expected for coverage of a local calamity, *The New York Times* published more than a dozen stories the next morning. Over the course of the calendar year, the *Times* would present over 600 news stories, editorials and OpEd pieces relating to the blast. The *Post*, though not covering a local event, would do more than 170 stories.

On Thursday, March 4, the arrest of Mohammed Salameh, who was said to associate with Islamic militants, shifted the focus of terrorism coverage in the direction of the Middle East. Two days later the *Times* gave a reasonably comprehensive look at the growth of “Islamic terror groups” in a piece by Youssef M. Ibrahim on page A24. Referring to the recruits for these groups, Ghassan Salame, an expert on the Middle East from the Paris Institute of Political Studies, was quoted as saying: “They differ from the older generation in three crucial ways. First, their impatience with the status quo is stronger. Second, their willingness to use force is palpable. Third, their list of enemies is much longer.”¹

On March 28, the *Times* disclosed that the newspaper had received a letter, linking the bombing to U.S. support of Israel.² In that same edition would appear the earliest mention of Osama bin Laden found in this study, a reference deep in a 1,200-

word story on page A14 that Yemeni officials suspected the Sudan-based militant of financing terrorism by Afghanistan veterans in Yemen.³

My research over the next eight years of coverage, leading to 9/11, would reveal few pieces like Ibrahim's that probed at the origins of what appeared to be a growing Islamic terrorist threat. On May 1, the *Post's* Caryle Murphy, reporting from Cairo, took up an even rarer topic: the role that western policies might have played in igniting Islamic passions. She cited, "...the psychological and political repercussions on the Islamic movement of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, a perception by Islamic militants that the West has a double standard when it comes to enforcing U.N. resolutions..."⁴

The following day a *Times* story by Richard Bernstein made the point that the security Americans might have felt against terrorism was now gone. The headline was: "Blast Shatters the Illusion that U.S. Soil Is Immune from Assault." One source was Bruce Hoffman from the RAND Corporation, who said the bombing seemed to be the work of amateurs. He added, "We have the illusion that we are immune to terrorism and terrorists abroad see us that way. Now terrorists abroad may say 'If this is what the second string was able to accomplish, imagine what a first-string terrorist group could do.' This incident may ironically make the United States a more attractive target for terrorism than in the past." This was one of the earliest direct references in either newspaper to a changing threat of terrorism *within* American borders.

In the years covered by this research, statements that directly addressed the threat of additional terrorist acts within the U.S. appeared occasionally and not always prominently. The Bernstein piece ran on page A39. But on July 3, the *Times* did publish on page A1 a report that the "Islamic Group," the followers of Sheik Omar Abdel

Rahman, who had just been arrested in the U.S., pledged to hit new American targets, including some in the U.S. (Later in July, the *Times* made one of its infrequent references to aviation security with a report on page A16 that a system that had been in place for 20 years, primarily to block hijackers, might “not be adequate against a growing terrorist threat.” Despite what was a prophetic statement, the paper apparently did not initiate any enterprise reporting on the system before 9/11.)

Also, in the category of assessing preparedness, a story in the Outlook section of the Sunday *Post* on June 13, by freelance terrorism specialist Steven Emerson said the FBI had received a “general warning” from German intelligence agents that Islamic terrorists were shifting their emphasis to U.S.-based targets. The FBI disregarded the warning, Emerson charged.⁵ The next month the *Post* also took a look at what appeared to be lax rules at the Immigration and Naturalization Service that allowed terrorists to easily enter the country. At this point, many of the elements that would come together in the attacks of 9/11, eight years later, were at least being touched upon by both papers – aviation security, entry into the U.S. by dangerous persons, domestic targets and enflamed passions.

Newspaper coverage is, by its nature, free flowing and bound to include contradictions, especially when viewed in hindsight. For example, in its editions of June 27, 1993, the *Times* quoted a private security official, the former Police Commissioner of New York City Robert J. McGuire, saying “the world has changed...(in light of the terrorist bombing of the World Trade Center.)” But on December 20, 1993, the *Times* reported that the Port Authority was searching for a new advertising agency “to encourage the leasing of office space, tourist visits and the use of the shops and

restaurants at the complex.” In this regard, the newspaper may well have been accurately reflecting a return to complacency on the part of New Yorkers following the February, 1993, blast.

On April 14, 1994, the *Post* reported on a development indicating that the farther removed from a terrorist event, the lesser the vigilance. Reporter Roberto Suro revealed that the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was no longer running routine fingerprint checks on immigrants in an attempt to prevent known terrorists from entering the country. Previously, the Suro article said, “thousands” of people a year had been blocked from entry.⁶

Even people who visited the World Trade Center near the one-year anniversary of the blast were forgetting the shock. N.R. Kleinfield reported on page A1 of the *Times*: “People scurry through the two towers untouched by year-old ghosts. ‘I feel safer here in this place than on the streets of New York,’ remarked a cheery Matthew Dillard, a 25-year-old computer consultant from Annandale, Va., who was interviewed on the observation deck the other day. ‘I have for the most part forgotten about that attack.’ ”⁷

A review of the *Post* and *Times* in 1994 reveals little intensive reporting or analysis of terrorism beyond coverage of the trial. The *Times*, perhaps particularly preoccupied with coverage of the trial, did less analysis of the terrorism threat than the *Post* in 1994. One exception was a prescient piece in *The New York Times Magazine* by Tim Weiner on March 13, 1994, looking at the consequences of the war in Afghanistan in which the U.S. had aided the rebels against the Russians.

Weiner reported on the many training camps for militants, though he did not link them to international terrorism at that time. But there was one chilling passage in which

an old Afghan man told the reporter that the pre-Taliban leadership had been put in place by the Americans. “Now,” he said, “we want the United States to shake these leaders and make them stop the killing to save us from them.” He concluded, “There is a fire burning in Afghanistan. Now, if there is a fire in my house, and my neighbor won’t help put it out, what kind of neighbor is he? Doesn’t he understand that his own house may burn?”

There was also a story in the *Post* that was predictive of an attitude that would gain prominence during the post-9/11 period. Daniel Pipes, writing in the Sunday Outlook section of the *Post*, reported on the disbelief in the Middle East over terrorist deeds that to more objective eyes seemed almost certainly the work of Islamic militants.⁸

In a New York City courtroom, four Middle Eastern men had been found guilty of planting a bomb in the World Trade Center in 1993, and they had admitted that they hated the U.S. Pipes wrote, “Few Middle Easterners saw things so simply. For them the real question is: Which government was the gang working for? The American or the Israeli?”

So in the aftermath of the February bombing, the nation’s two leading newspapers on public policy were touching on most of the important questions, though not often and not prominently.

II.

1995-97: Oklahoma City, Tokyo Subways, Khobar Towers and Atlanta Olympics

This was a quiet period as measured by anti-American terrorism attacks that were international in origin. The Oklahoma City explosion, which killed 168 people on April

19, 1995, was a horrific event that dominated the news for weeks, but it was quickly determined to be domestic terrorism. There were other events in the time period (see Key Dates box, page 3), but none appeared to have an impact on the national psyche. The chemical attack on the Tokyo subways on March 20, 1995, would resonate most strongly in cities that have underground transportation and was deemed domestic terrorism. The blast of the Khobar Tower residential building near Dharam was shocking with its death toll of 19 American servicemen, but deaths of military abroad on a one-time basis have limited staying power on front pages. Finally, the bomb that went off after midnight on July 27, at Centennial Park in Atlanta, killing one and injuring more than 100, has never to date been tagged as international terrorism and took place during a special event that was soon over.

The mood of the period was perhaps symbolized by a quote from a *Post* story on April 21, following bomb threats that involved federal buildings in 11 cities the day before. Mike Ackerman, managing director of a security firm in Miami, noted: “For three to six months after the world Trade Center bombing, they really paid attention to security in New York. The problem is that after nothing happens, you tend to lose focus. In some ways terrorists can almost predict when we’re going to lose focus.” In the story, New York City Police Commissioner William Bratton said it is “almost impossible” to secure any building, particularly one with parking nearby. He said good intelligence is the best defense.⁹

One analyst who did not lose sight of the larger issues was Harvard’s Graham Allison who, writing for the *Post* on the threat of “loose nukes” in the post-Cold War period, made this chilling point:

“What prevented the Oklahoma City bombers or the terrorists who sought to topple the World Trade Center two years earlier from causing much greater damage? Certainly, no moral or humane inhibition about killing children. The operative constraint was the technical capacity for destruction that they could readily acquire.”¹⁰

At this point, Allison’s thinking was ahead of any seen in the two newspapers. In fact, at a Harvard forum in the Spring of 2002, Allison made an observation that he had been studying Osama bin Laden “since 1993,” a time in which the Saudi Arabian militant had yet to surface in the American press.

At various times in the study period, the academics studying terrorism seemed to be ahead of the reporters in the intensity of their efforts. For example, judging by what appeared in print, no reporter on either the *Post* or *Times* between 1993 and 2001 talked directly to terrorists in the Islamic world nearly so much as Harvard’s Jessica Stern.¹¹

III.

1998 – The Embassy bombings and U.S. retaliations

In this year, the threat of international terrorism moved closer to center stage in the *Times* and *Post*, but, alas, center stage was already occupied: Congress was engaged in impeachment proceedings against the President of the United States. Nexis is not suitable for exact numerical comparisons, but it is worth noting that a search for articles that prominently mentioned “terrorist” or “terrorism” and “threat” in the two newspapers produced a total of fewer than 150 returns for 1998. Searching the same newspapers for the words “impeach” or “impeachment” in prominence ran afoul of the system’s limits. There were more than 1,000 examples for each newspaper that year.

Terrorism was not much in 1998's headlines until August 7, when U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were bombed. But in hindsight from the attacks of 9/11, a few of the articles before August 7 are notable.

The *Post* reported on January 6, that federal officials were offering a training course to prepare local institutions for the perceived growing threat of chemical or biological attacks within the capital: "...(F)ederal and city officials acknowledged that a lack of preparation and planning means the capital remains especially vulnerable to massive casualties in such an attack." ¹²

Meantime, in the *Times* on February 25, a small Reuters story on page A11 reported that U.S. intelligence officials were warning about "Islamic edicts" calling for attacks on U.S. civilians throughout the world. The edict was published "in the name of a group headed by Osama Bin Ladin (sic)." ¹³

On April 23, the *Times* reported that Attorney General Janet Reno had floated the idea of creating a "national stockpile" of antidotes and vaccines to protect the civilian population against chemical or biological attacks.

Further on germ warfare, the *Post* reported on page A1 on May 21, that President Clinton had ordered that vaccines and antibiotics be stockpiled by the U.S. to protect American civilians against a germ attack. ¹⁴ The *Times* followed the next day with coverage of the formal speech by Clinton. ¹⁵

Unlike some other White House announcements on terrorism, (see reference to fire department equipment, page 20-21), this one was followed up aggressively by the *Times*. In a piece that coincidentally ran on August 7, the day the embassies were hit, William Broad and Judith Miller dissected the defects and controversies in the

Administration's germ warfare plan in a 3,400-word piece on page A1. Early in the year and again at year's end, the *Times*' Broad and Miller kept a bead on the weaknesses of the germ warfare defense and the rising fears of vulnerability. In the latter of these two excellent pieces was a quote that would have greater resonance three years later. Robert M. Blitzer, who had recently left the FBI after being in charge of its domestic terrorism sector, said of the germ warfare threat, "Eventually, this is going to hurt us. There is no question in my mind."¹⁶

Also in the spring, the *Post* broke an exclusive report on a federal interagency study of the more general terrorism threat, from both domestic and international sources. Commissioned by Attorney General Janet Reno after the Oklahoma City bombing, the study found "widespread deficiencies in the federal government's ability to combat terrorism, from a lack of intelligence-sharing on domestic plotters to the need for smaller tracking devices that will escape detection when placed on people and cars." It also proposed various actions aimed at combating the threat of germ and chemical warfare.¹⁷ Less than a month earlier, the *Post* reported on page A3 that Defense Secretary William S. Cohen was adding 10 new emergency teams to cope with chemical or biological attacks within the U.S.¹⁸ Compared to the previous three years, the intensity of anti-terrorist coverage was at least somewhat higher, though it fell far short of dominating the news pages.

On May 22, President Clinton picked up on some of these same themes in delivering the commencement address at the U.S. Naval Academy. He specifically mentioned international terrorists as the type of nontraditional threats to U.S. security that needed to be considering in defense policy. He issued security directives that included

the establishment of a national Coordinator for Security, Infrastructure and Counter-terrorism, arguably the precursor for the Homeland Security position filled by Tom Ridge after 9/11. The *Post* story ran on page A3.¹⁹ A few weeks later, the *Post* reported on a major disaster drill planned for Washington, D.C., with a focus on chemical and biological warfare.²⁰

With the exception of the *Times* report on germ warfare, most of the stories at this point in 1998 had reflected that government appeared to be working harder on the terrorism issue than the press, which is probably better than the converse.

For much of 1998, the Clinton Administration was pressuring Iraq to allow United Nations weapons inspectors full access. There were repeated threats of bombing attacks against Iraq. (These ultimately took place in mid-December). On February 14, the *Post* published a letter from a retired professor of international affairs at George Washington University that reflected a view seldom found in news accounts or even OpEd pieces in either the *Post* or *Times*. The letter writer stated in part:

“Crushing the disarmed and starved Iraq is likely to enrage Arab masses, boost Muslim fundamentalism and fuel terrorism. If Saddam is as devilish as he is presented, his agents may already be sitting in a number of places clutching the jars of anthrax to be released at a proper time.”²¹

It was a sentiment that may have seemed alarmist regarding bioterrorism in early 1998 but far less so in late 2001. In any event, it was rarely expressed in these two leading American newspapers.

On August 7, U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were bombed, killing 218 people, including 10 Americans. On August 21, the U.S. launched retaliatory strikes

against a suspected terrorist camp in Afghanistan and a suspected chemical warfare facility in Khartoum, Sudan. This news merited considerable front-page coverage and from this point until 9/11, terrorism was a more prominent topic in major newspapers. The attention was further fueled by the apparent attempts at terrorism in conjunction with the millennium celebrations at the end of 1999 and the water-borne bomb that left a gaping hole in the side of the destroyer, U.S.S. Cole, in the port of Aden, Yemen, on October 12, 2000.

In the *Post* at least three front-page stories, between August 13 and 21, focused on Osama bin Laden as the prime suspect in the embassy bombings.²² The *Times* Week In Review section on Sunday, August 23, included a taste of Osama bin Laden in his own words. The text in part:

“...After World War II, the Americans became more aggressive and oppressive, especially in the Muslim world...American history does not distinguish between civilians and the military, and not even women and children. They are the ones who used the bombs against Nagasaki. Can these bombs distinguish between infants and the military? America does not have a religion that will prevent it from destroying all people.”

The attacks on the embassies provoked a degree of introspection about international terrorism that was almost never seen in these newspapers between 1993 and September 11, 2001. There was little news reporting on people who held these views, but their sentiments were found in pieces on the opinion pages of both papers.

In its Outlook section on Sunday, August 30, the *Post* published one of those rare pieces that went beyond the “threat” of terrorism to the underlying conditions that might breed it. Echoing in some ways the letter from the retired professor at George

Washington, former CIA official Raymond Close made these observations, among others:

“Most of us accept the premise that terrorism is a phenomenon that can be defeated only by better ideas, by persuasion and, most importantly, by amelioration of the conditions that inspire it. Terrorism’s best asset, in the final analysis, is the fire in the bellies of its young men, and that fire cannot be extinguished by Tomahawk missiles.”

And...

“In declaring a full-scale war on terrorism, the Clinton administration seems tempted to emulate Israel’s failed example. This is understandable, but wrong. Israel’s situation is totally different from ours in every imaginable way. The state of Israel has been committed for 50 years to a policy of massive and ruthless retaliation – deliberately disproportional. ‘Ten eyes for an eye,’ the Israelis like to say. And still their policy fails, because they have not recognized what the thoughtful ones among them know to be true – that terrorism will thrive as long as the Palestinian population is obsessed with the injustice of their lot and consumed with despair. Wise and experienced Israeli intelligence officials have conceded to me that the brilliantly ‘successful’ assassination of a Palestinian terrorist leader in Gaza a couple of years ago led directly to the series of suicide bombings that helped bring Israel Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to power – and may thereby have set back Israel’s chances for peace for many years to come.”

In the *Times* on August 16, Robert M. Gates, who was Director of Central Intelligence under President George Bush, outlined his ideas on how to fight terrorism at its roots:

“We can pursue a peace in the Middle East that does not kowtow to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s obstructionism and betrayal of Yitzhak Rabin’s legacy... We can promote human rights and political freedom in the Middle East as we did in the Soviet Union and try to now in Asia. We can use force against the sponsors of terrorism, whether governments or groups, or, in the case of individuals, we can arrest and try them to show that our reach is, in fact, as long as our memory.”

Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman also took a broader, step-back view. On August 22, he wrote, “The key to make the problem better is by a three-pronged policy: mercilessly attacking anyone, anywhere, who attacks our citizens or diplomats, embracing those who would be friends by constantly trying to build a moderate political center, particularly in the Muslim-Arab world, and always showing a road map to a better future for those who waver in between.”

Getting at underlying causes, he quoted historian Ronald Steel: “The cultural messages we transmit through Hollywood and McDonald’s go out across the world to capture and also undermine other societies. We are the apostles of globalization, the enemies of tradition and hierarchy.”

One does not have to agree with any or all of these opinions to nevertheless believe that this kind of analysis belongs in America’s leading newspapers, and in greater prominence than letters to the editor and freelance OpEd pieces.

Meantime, in the *Post* on September 4, 1998, a detailed, 1,500-word piece by correspondent Pamela Constable, told of different sides of life under the Taliban in Afghanistan. She interviewed those who chafed under their strict rules and those who

admired the Taliban in general and Osama bin Laden as well. It was published on the front of the Style section.

The *Post* also published an unusual piece on November 5, by Washington-based reporters Michael Grunwald and Vernon Loeb that quoted sources, named and unnamed, who questioned whether the role of Osama bin Laden and “al Qaida” (sic) were being overemphasized in the investigation of the embassy bombings.

The reporters cited terrorist expert Harvey Kushner who said the emphasis on bin Laden might be overdone. He said even the capture of bin Laden would not solve the problem of “why people like bin Laden get created, and why they have followers.” Again a quick reference, deep in a 1400-word story, to the broader issues of terrorism.

A more conventional approach to the problem was articulated in a *Post* Outlook section piece on Sunday, August 30, by Ralph Peters, a retired Army intelligence officer who wrote a novel, “The Devil’s Garden,” about terrorism. He urged military commitment beyond Clinton’s missile attacks to get at terrorists. The scenario he painted, including the use of Special Forces on the ground, closely mirrored the approach ultimately pursued in Afghanistan in the closing months of 2001.

The *Times* did publish on August 25, an account of how the missile attacks of August 21 were seen by a moderate Muslim in Sudan. A critic of bin Laden, this scholar said the attacks would only enhance the militant’s status. For the news columns of either the *Times* or the *Post*, this was a very broad worldview that was rarely reported on during the eight and a half years covered by this research.²³

So overall, the reporting and, to a lesser extent, the analysis on terrorism intensified in 1998, but the Clinton saga was preoccupying America so the prospect of educating even the more careful reading public was remote.

IV.

1999 – bin Laden’s higher profile

Between the attacks on the embassies in Africa in 1998, and the attack against the U.S.S. Cole in 2000, there were no major terrorist attacks against American targets at home or abroad in 1999 and coverage of the topic in the *Times* and *Post* was unremarkable. But there was far more notice made of Osama bin Laden. He was mentioned in the *Times* 162 times and in the *Post* 144 times. In 1997, the year before the bomb attacks against the embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, which were ultimately linked to bin Laden by authorities, there were three mentions in the *Post* and six in the *Times*.

In addition to the Osama interest, there was a smattering of articles that related in other ways to what would become the traumatic events of 9/11:

- In a front page interview with the *Times*, published January 22, 1999, President Clinton said it was “highly likely” that a germ or chemical attack would be launched against Americans at home within the next few years.²⁴
- Another front page story in the *Times* by Judith Miller revealed on September 22, 1999, that the Clinton Administration was seeking money to develop a laboratory for fighting germ warfare at the Plum Island Animal Disease Center on Plum Island, off Long Island.
- In the *Post* on March 16, appeared a story that again demonstrated that the White House could put the media spotlight on a topic but that that was no guarantee of

further attention. An article on page A11 reported that President Clinton would commit millions of dollars to “equip and train” firefighters around the country so they could better respond to acts of terrorism. It was reported that the Justice Department would provide nearly \$70 million in grants nationwide. A Nexis survey of the *Post* from that date until September 11, 2001, did not turn up a further mention of this program.²⁵

- The *Times* reported that a growing fear that New York City’s public and private institutions could be targeted by terrorists, particularly as a result of the trials that would take place in 2000 of the suspects in the African embassy attacks.²⁶
- In the *Post*, a Stephen S. Rosenfeld commentary on the OpEd page focused on “homeland defense,” a precursor of “homeland security,” which would become a household term in 2001. The piece questioned whether a missile defense system made sense in an age when threats might come in many other forms as compared to during the years the U.S. centered its defenses on the Soviet Union.²⁷

In March and July there were significant pieces in the *Post* on bin Laden, including in March a warning from one terrorist that the deaths from the missile attack against a suspected training camp in Afghanistan the previous August would be avenged. The unnamed member of the terrorist group Harkat, which was linked to bin Laden, said. “For each of us killed or wounded in the cowardly U.S. attack, at least 100 Americans will be killed...I may not be alive, but you will remember my words.” The July story, on page A3, said bin Laden was still a threat. “We haven’t killed him off,” said Robert Oakley, a former counterterrorism official in the State Department. “But we’ve clearly reduced his ability to do things.”²⁸ The *Times* reported on page A1 on April 13, 1999,

that American commandos were trying to capture bin Laden near the Pakistani border with Afghanistan. Some Administration critics questioned his importance.²⁹

Both papers covered the fears of terrorist attacks in connection with the coming Millennium celebrations at year's end. On December 16, the *Post* said it had obtained a copy of a report by a commission on the threat of terrorism, headed by Gov. James S. Gilmore III of Virginia. The commission, noting that terrorists with weapons of mass destruction were a "genuine threat," questioned whether governments were prepared to deal with the results, particularly the issue of federal vs. state responsibilities. The story was published on page A6.³⁰ The *Times* did not report on the Gilmore document.

When pulled out of a larger context, these articles – viewed through a rear view mirror from 9/11 – seem significant. But spread across a whole year, they probably had much less impact on most readers.

V.

2000-2001: First the *Post* and then the *Times* give the threat at home new attention.

This was a curious period in which the *Times*, during 2000, seemed to lose sight of terrorism as a priority, though it covered extensively the attack on the U.S.S. Cole in October of that year. Then the newspaper's focus returned in 2001 with some probing work on bin Laden and Afghanistan that was ultimately part of a Pulitzer Prize winning effort.

In 2000, while the *Times*' attention to terrorism appeared to wane, the *Post* reported a significant number of *de facto* warnings concerning terrorism within U.S. borders. Among them:

- “Although New Year’s celebrations have passed safely and Clinton administration officials are relieved, federal law enforcement leaders say it is not time to relax – based on threats not directly tied to the year 2000 coming out of the Middle East and elsewhere. ‘It is clear and should be clear to all Americans that the risk of terrorism will continue,’ said Attorney General Janet Reno.”³¹
- “Key to Clarke’s (Richard Clarke, counterterrorism specialist in the National Security Council of Clinton administration) thinking is the idea that a new breed of global terrorist—embodied by bin Laden—has developed the ruthlessness and resources to carry its war to American soil. He said in an interview that America’s new enemies are certainly not going to repeat Saddam Hussein’s mistake of lining ‘his tanks up in the desert’ for U.S. forces to destroy. ‘they will come after our weakness, our Achilles heel, which is largely here in the United States.’ ”³²
- “At the same time, the report said, the United States faces new threats from loosely organized terrorist networks operating out of lawless ‘swamps’ such as Afghanistan, whose ruling Taliban movement, while professing no grudge against the West, continues to harbor fugitive Saudi extremist Osama bin Laden.”³³
- “‘The United States has no coherent, functional national strategy for combating terrorism,’ (Virginia Gov. James S.) Gilmore said. ‘The terrorist threat is real, and it is serious.’ ” (Gilmore headed a federal commission on terrorism.)³⁴

- “The report (by the National Intelligence Council)...also concludes that terrorist attacks against the United States through 2015 ‘will become increasingly sophisticated and designed to achieve mass casualties.’ ”³⁵

But there were some mixed messages in the pages of the *Post*, not necessarily a bad thing for a newspaper. Former State Department counterterrorism official, Larry C. Johnson, who would write a *Times* OpEd piece in July, 2001, expressing similar opinions, was cited as playing down the terrorist threat. Johnson said the National Commission on Terrorism (yet another anti-terrorism panel, this one known as the Bremer Commission) had greatly exaggerated the threat. “We need a little bit more mature approach to this,” he said. “Is there the potential for mass casualties? Yes, but we don’t have to reinvent the wheel in counterterrorist policy.” Reporter Vernon Loeb on June 23, paraphrased Johnson said said that a global counterterrorist campaign had been “effective at disrupting the activities of terrorist groups linked to Saudi exile Osama bin Laden...”³⁶

But in the *Times* in 2000, there was perhaps the most uninhibited commentary seen in the two newspapers during the eight and a half years spanned by this research. It was published on October 14, two days after the attack on the Cole in Yemen. An OpEd piece, it was by Reuel Marc Gerecht, a former Middle East specialist in the Central Intelligence Agency. He wrote in part:

“The Clinton administration has tenaciously pursued a peace process that Muslims regard as an insult to their pride. Muslims from Tangiers to Tehran may be willing to concede that Israel exists because, as the Soviets used to say, the correlation of forces allows no other alternative. But they rebel against the idea that Jews have a legitimate, historic

right to a state west of the Jordan River, which is, after all, the ultimate objective of the peace process. For decades, the State Department has operated under the assumption that with the right batch of Israeli concessions the Arab world would tire, cut a deal, and recognize the legitimacy of the Jewish state.”

He also wrote:

“Though esteemed for their knowledge, Jews are usually characterized in Islamic tradition as cowardly and weak. Losing to Christians over the last 300 years has been bad enough, losing to Jews since 1947 has been especially galling.”

He said further., “...the Muslim reluctance to concede that ‘Muslim lands’ can ever legitimately be relinquished to infidels is age-old. Imbedded into Islamic law and custom..”

Whether he was right or wrong , Gerecht was taking straight on the issues of ethnic conflict in a way that was almost never seen in the American media.

But as the 11th of September dawned, there had been no notable public debate in America on any of the issues relating to terrorism, e.g. were we sufficiently prepared, or was there anything we should be doing in the Middle East to combat hatred of the U.S., whether in evaluating foreign policies or even in paying more attention to telling our story to the Islamic world.

What were they reading in Tampa?

The Tampa Tribune is a quality regional paper of medium size. Its daily circulation is 242,938 (September, 2001). Comparisons by Nexis search are not necessarily definitive, but I wanted to choose one smaller paper to compare in general terms what was available to readers who do not buy *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post* on a regular basis. Indeed, it would be difficult to find the *Post* on a same day basis in Tampa, except perhaps in the high tourism months of mid-winter.

A comparison for four years of the study period – 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998 – was done using the key words of “terrorism” or “terrorist” and “threat. When these words were used in searches of the *Times* they turned up 299 articles, editorials, columns or letters. The comparable total for the *Post* was 258. For the *Tampa Tribune*, the four-year total was 46.

Obviously, the “trickle down” effect for serious news with an international aspect may be very limited. Although television news was not a part of this study, any observer of the major networks in the past decade would not be optimistic about finding much there, though the coverage after 9/11 was very strong. To its credit, ABC News broadcast an exclusive interview with bin Laden in May 1998.

Although the *Tampa Tribune* numbers are not impressive, the newspaper did do many of the 46 stories with its own staff reporters, concentrating on local aspects of the terrorism threat, an apt role for a regional paper. The total does include one column by the *Times*’ Thomas Friedman.

Conclusions

In the Introduction of this paper, two standards were articulated for evaluating the content:

- 1. The published information would help a reader understand that there was a realistic and perhaps likely threat of a major terrorist attack by Islamic militants against a target within American borders.**
- 2. The published information would help a reader understand the broader aspects of the terrorism issue – for example, why attitudes toward the U.S. within the Islamic world were often hostile and, at the extremes, very dangerous and violent.**

I.

Coverage of the threat

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks much was made of the perceived failure of the press to publish clear warnings that terrorists might strike. Forget that the more crucial performance of the CIA could not have been much better, the critics homed in on the failure of *The New York Times* in particular to report on the conclusions of the United States Commission on National Security when it issued its final report at the end of January, 2001. Harold Evans, the distinguished former editor of the *Times* and the *Sunday Times* of London, excoriated *The New York Times* in the November-December issue of the *Columbia Journalism Review* under the headline, “WHAT WE KNEW: WARNING GIVEN... STORY MISSED.”

In his CJR piece, Evans said, “We were warned.” He quotes the commission’s warning, “Americans will likely die on American soil, possibly in large numbers.” Evans

failed to note that this and other predictions by Hart-Rudman were in an extended time frame -- “over the next quarter century.” Not the kind of stuff that energizes headline writers.

The commission, co-chaired by former Senators Warren Rudman and Gary Hart, issued a report that was crammed much more with proposed changes in government policies than with warnings. The particular alarm Evans quoted had been made initially in the panel’s “phase one” report in 1999. (Though that report also got scant press coverage.)³⁷

In fact, that same month that Evans was writing about, January 2001, the staff of *The New York Times* produced an impressive three-part series on the terrorist threat that, with all due respect to the members of the Hart-Rudman Commission, was more compelling in its exposure of the threat.

The first piece, a 6,200-word examination of Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda network, tied bin Laden to both the World Trade Center bombing and the embassy attacks. It noted, “Al Qaeda trains ‘sleeper’ agents, or ‘submarines’ to live undetected among local populations,” and that attacks are planned “months or years in advance.”³⁸ In part three of the series, a reporter visited training camps for terrorists in Afghanistan.³⁹

This doesn’t excuse the curious oversight of the *Times* in ignoring the commission. But it does undermine the contention that they “missed” the story. In fact, the three-part series was part of a *Times* package that was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting in 2002.

So now that we've put that little *contretemps* to rest, does that mean that America's elite press was up to the task of preparing its readers for anything approximating the attacks of 9/11? As the Hertz commercial puts it, not exactly.

Despite some patches of excellent work by both the *Post* and the *Times*, particularly the latter, this detailed study of the content from those years demonstrates what the veteran CBS reporter, Bob Schieffer, meant when he said of the months before 9/11, "Terrorism was not on anyone's front burner in those days."⁴⁰

In 2000, for example, readers of the *Times* would know that the newspaper was far more energized by the question of whether Wen Ho Lee, a scientist at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, had passed nuclear secrets to the Chinese government. Dr. Lee was eventually cleared, but during 2000, there had been 15 front page stories in the *Times* on his case.

This does not mean they were wrong to actively pursue the Wen Ho Lee story (though the *Times*' aggressiveness on this story did become an issue after Dr. Lee was released from custody), but by comparison the newspaper published only four pieces on page A1 that year that prominently mentioned Osama bin Laden, despite the attack on the U.S.S. Cole that occurred on October 12. The following year, between January 1 and September 10, 2001, there were 10 front page stories in the *Times* that prominently mentioned bin Laden, although only half of them referred directly or indirectly to the terrorist leader in headlines.

For the 11 months between October 12, 2000, and September 11, 2001, a Nexis search indicates that the *Times* published only six stories on A1 that prominently mentioned a threat of terrorists or terrorism.⁴¹

So the general conclusion of the research is reflected in these numbers. By no means was the newspaper ignoring the issue of bin Laden or the terrorist threat. But one could argue that the newspaper never sent a strong signal of priority regarding terrorism through sustained page one attention. And while the January piece put the threat of bin Laden in high profile, a piece several months later poked holes in the menacing image of his terrorist group (to paraphrase the headline of a May 31 story on page A1). Reporter Benjamin Weiser said the embassy bombings trial “made clear that while Mr. Bin Laden may be a global menace, his group, Al Qaeda, was at time slipshod, torn by inner strife, betrayal, greed and the banalities of life...”⁴²

As the findings indicate, the *Post* also did solid work on terrorism, though not with the intensity with which the *Times* covered the germ warfare threat in 1998 and bin Laden’s terrorism network in early 2001. Occasionally the performance of the *Post* was more consistent than the *Times*. For example, for calendar year 2000, a search of key words depicting the terrorist threat yielded 12 significant stories from the *Post*; none from the *Times*⁴³.

Both newspapers extensively covered several major terrorism attacks during the study period, which included events stretching from the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center to the 2000 attack against the U.S.S. Cole. The news stories were not included in the research, because such coverage was not optional. On the other hand, the examples of excellent reporting and analysis that are included in this study must be considered in the context of the whole newspapers in which they were published. These are comprehensive publications that put an average of seven stories on Page A1 every day, 365 days a year, or a total of nearly 22,000 front page stories over eight and a half

years. And if one assumes about 30 national or foreign stories totally in each edition of the *Times* and *Post* for the same period, they appeared among more than 90,000 articles in each paper over the study period. Each newspaper also would have published more than 12,000 OpEd pieces. The *Times* would have presented a similar number of editorials and the *Post* about 8,000. So it is noteworthy that within a universe of perhaps 224,000 articles, this research focused on about 2,300, or little more than one percent, that fit minimal criteria for review. So despite the good work that was found, one is again reminded of Bob Schieffer's remark, quoted earlier, that terrorism was not on anyone's "front burner."

It must also be noted that during all the years of this study, a large body of work concerning terrorism was being compiled in the academic community. Though there was not time to review all of it, one must note the work at Harvard of Graham Allison, Ashton B. Carter, Laura K. Donohue, Richard A. Falkenrath, Juliette Kayyem, Joseph S. Nye and Jessica Stern, among many others. The John F. Kennedy School of Government lists more than 35 papers and articles on terrorism by members of the faculty just since 1998. Martha Crenshaw of Wesleyan University and Brigitte Nacos of Columbia University are just two of many others who were doing significant studies of terrorism during these years, and surely there were many others throughout the U.S.

One could argue whether in the natural order of things it isn't unsurprising that the academic community would be ahead of the press in at least the intensity of its attention to the topic, but as a journalist I still must confess some surprise at the comparative large volume of academic work that was being done prior to 9/11.

Still, as Crenshaw has found, the academic work generally occurred in a relatively narrow field regarding “loose nukes” and other weapons of mass destruction. Attacks such as those against the Khobar Towers and the U.S.S. Cole, which bore more resemblance tactically to the attacks of 9/11, did not seem to fire the passions of the academic world.

In March, 2002, Crenshaw observed, “...(T)errorism was not generally considered an important national security threat unless it combined two dangers: a threat to the U.S. homeland and the use of “weapons of mass destruction, ‘ defined as nuclear, chemical, biological or radiological weapons.’ ” (Emphasis hers)⁴⁴

(As noted earlier, Jessica Stern did impressive work on attitudes of Islamic militants, much of it through personal interviews.)

One paper, published by the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College in 1995, did predict that American foreign policy operations (this was during the Clinton Administration) were inviting a response from terrorists against targets within U.S. borders. Stephen Sloan, a professor of political science at the University of Oklahoma, wrote:

“...(E)ven if Washington is motivated by the highest of ideals, i.e. democratization, humanitarian assistance, or nation-building, those who will be the objects of such efforts might resent it. Their use of terrorism on American soil is a likely response.”⁴⁵ .

News coverage in the *Post* and *Times* during the research period tended to concentrate on the most likely terrorists and potential targets rather than the potential weapons, except for work done on germ and chemical threats, particularly by the *Times*

in 1998. So as Crenshaw's research indicates, there was a difference in emphasis between the work of academics and the reporting in these two newspapers.

II.

Coverage of Attitudes Toward U.S./Roots of Terrorism

As to the second standard used in evaluating press content for this study – the relevance to attitudes toward the U.S. and other possible roots of terrorism – this is largely a barren landscape over the eight and a half years of the research.

This study yielded an occasional piece – most notably the OpEd piece by Robert Gates and an occasional column by the redoubtable Tom Friedman – that looked at terrorism or terrorists in a broader, geopolitical context. But they were by far the exceptions.

Even the publication in 1997 of “The Clash of Civilizations” by Samuel P. Huntington (Touchstone Books), expanding on a Summer 1993 article in *Foreign Affairs*, prompted little more than book reviews in the *Times* and *Post*. My searches of the two newspapers found no prominent links between the points Huntington raised on conflict between religious cultures and the seeming growth of terrorist threats against the United States. (The *Foreign Affairs* article followed by only a few months the bombing of the World Trade Center.) But Huntington himself did the kind of analysis that was almost never seen in those newspapers:

“The West, and especially the United States, which has always been a missionary nation, believe that the non-Western people should commit themselves to the Western values of democracy, free markets, limited government, human rights, individuals, the rule of law

and should embody these values in their institutions...What is universalism to the West is imperialism to the rest.’’⁴⁶

Understandably, this is tricky terrain on which to write for the public prints. One person’s efforts to explain conditions that might provoke enough rage to fuel a suicide bomber is another person’s *apologia* for those who would murder innocent people.

Concern for what one might call “Patriotic Correctness” in the U.S. was so strong in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks that the five major television news organizations agreed to follow Bush Administration guidelines for handling videotapes of Osama bin Laden.⁴⁷

At times these inhibitions gave me pause in my own research. Was this a reasonable quest to find such content?

I was inspired at a midpoint in my work by a remarkably generous statement from Mariane Pearl, widow of the murdered journalist, Daniel Pearl. On February 22, 2002, when her husband’s death had been confirmed, she said:

“Revenge would be easy, but it is far more valuable in my opinion to address this problem of terrorism with enough honesty to question our own responsibility as nations and as individuals for the rise of terrorism.”

This kind of introspection had been almost totally absent in the American press, particularly before 9/11. There was not time to make a fair analysis of the academic efforts in this area, or to know the classified work of the U.S. Government. It is noteworthy that three of the better OpEd pieces on what drives terrorists were written by former CIA officials (Gates, Close and Gerecht). Also, *The Atlantic Monthly* did a

number of thoughtful articles related to terrorists and motivations in the 15 years prior to 9/11. ⁴⁸

Perhaps not surprisingly, these inhibitions in newspapers flared up particularly in the immediate aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. T.R. Reid, a London-based correspondent for the *Post*, told Christiane Amanpour on CNN International on October 6, 2001, that he worried about writing on the topic of how much the U.S. was hated in the Islamic world.

“I think we can explain why people wanted to do this to our country,” Reid said, “without being apologists for terror.”

But he cautioned, “If I wrote this story now, thousands of people would write into the *Washington Post* and say, ‘Fire the guy’ ”

He said that eventually such stories would be written, and they were.

One senses the taboos, to the extent they existed, continue to ease. At a conference at Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government in May, 2002, there were panels on “Root Causes of Terrorism” and “What Can Be Done to Address the Root Causes of Terrorism.”

In the weeks after 9/11, *Newsweek* and *The Boston Globe* both published major presentations under the headline “Why They Hate Us.” Other publications, including the *Los Angeles Times* did similar stories.

Timothy Garton Ash, director of the European Studies Centre at St. Antony’s College, Oxford, and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford, wrote an OpEd piece in the *Times* in April, 2002, that carried the headline, “The Peril of Too Much Power.” He said, “Contrary to what many Europeans think, the problem with American

power is not that it is American. The problem is simply the power. It would be dangerous even for an archangel to wield so much power.” There is no way to prove or disprove that this piece would have appeared in the *Times* before 9/11. But it’s certainly debatable.

One does not have to believe that U.S. policies are necessarily misguided to advocate that there be an uninhibited debate in the pages of the American press. It is always possible that there might be better policies for the U.S., whether in its use of military and diplomatic power or the purveying of our culture – our “soft power,” as Joseph S. Nye, Jr. writes.

But how will we know if we don’t ask?

III.

Practical lessons

No one would argue that more aggressive press coverage could have prevented the attacks of 9/11. So what importance can be attached to the coverage of terrorism before that infamous date, and does it teach us anything?

At a minimum, the quality media don’t want to be surprised by historic events any more than government does. In the case of media, it is a challenge that must be met to some degree in order to hold readership and audiences. Beyond that, it could be argued that accurate, predictive coverage, if of necessity generalized, can provide some benefit to prepare the nation for change. It might not alter history, but it could minimize some of the impacts, perhaps even loss of life. Surely it is possible that government and media

combined to increase vigilance and possibly thwart danger from additional terrorist attacks in the immediate months after 9/11.

It would be easy to point the finger at editors and say they should have been more concerned about terrorism from 1993 to September, 2001. I could point the finger at myself. Yes, and throw in all the governments of the free world as well. But more realistically, the coverage in the *Times* and *Post*, as outlined in this paper, demonstrates the value of well-resourced newspapers that have expert journalists who can follow areas of coverage that are not necessarily an immediate priority. The work of such journalists as Judith Miller and Stephen Engleberg of the *Times* and Caryle Murphy of the *Post* could be cited as an example. The question facing even the best newspapers in America, given economic pressures, is whether they can continue to afford these kinds of specialists who may be probing important issues even when they are not front page news. As flawed as the overall coverage of terrorism might have been between 1993 and 2001, it would have been almost negligible without the expertise of these experienced, dedicated reporters. One can only hope that the *Times*, *Post* and other news outlets will continue to support this kind of work.

Finally, it behooves editorial page and OpEd editors to be sure their pages meet issues head-on, even those that run the risk of drawing criticism from super patriots and others with strong opposing views. Indeed, publishers and editors might consider expanding the space they devote to opinion pieces. A free and vigorous debate almost always serves the nation best.

***Veronica Villasenor, a second-year Masters in Public Policy degree candidate at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, provided research assistance for this paper.**

Endnotes

¹ Ibrahim, Youssef M., “Throughout Arab World, 20 Years of Growth of Islamic Terror Groups,” *The New York Times*, March 6, 1993, p. A24.

² Mitchell, Alison, “Letter Explained Motive in Bombing, Officials Now Say,” *The New York Times*, March 28, 1993, p. A1.

³ Hedges, Chris, “Muslim Militants Share Afghan Link,” *The New York Times*, March 28, 1993, p. A14.

⁴ Murphy, Caryle, “West Has Helped Fuel New Islamic Militancy,” *The Washington Post*, May 1, 1993, p A15

⁵ Writing in *The Wall Street Journal* on May 31, 2001, Emerson, along with Daniel Pipes, probably came as close as any American journalist in predicting the events of September 11, 2001. They said, “Indeed, recent information shows that Al-Qaeda is not only planning new attacks on the U.S. but is also expanding its operational range in countries such as Jordan and Israel.” (p. A16.)

⁶ During 1994, the *Post* published 54 stories that mentioned at least once each the terms “World Trade Center” and “bombing.” The *Times*, not surprisingly, had a considerably larger number of stories, 182 in total.

⁷ Kleinfield, N.R., “Reverberations: After math of a Bombing – A special report; Trade Center Blast’s Legacy: Security Improved, and Lost,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 1994, p. A1.

⁸ Pipes, Daniel, “The Paranoid Style in Mideast Politics; From the Gulf War to Somalia, Fear of a sinister Uncle Sam,” *The Washington Post*, November 6, 1994, p. C1.

⁹ Gugliotta, Guy and Barr, Stephen, “Preemption of Terrorists is Urged; Government Place on ‘Moderate Security Alert,’ Bomb Threats Close Buildings *The Washington Post*, April 21, 1995, p. A22.)

¹⁰ Allison, Graham, “Must We Wait for the Nuclear Morning After?” *The Washington Post*, April 30, 1995, p. C7

¹¹ See, for example, Stern, Jessica, “Meeting with the Muj,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, January/February 2001, p. 42 and Stern, Jessica, “Pakistan’s Jihad Culture,” *Foreign Affairs*, November-December 2000, p. 113.

¹² Graham, Bradley, “Local Authorities Train To Handle New Threat; Program Shows Emergency Crews Procedure in Germ, Chemical Strike.,” *The Washington Post*, January 6, 1998, p.A1.

¹³ Weiner, Tim, “Reno says U.S. May Stockpile Medicine for Terrorist Attacks,” *The New York Times*, April 23, 1998, p. A14.)

¹⁴ Graham, Bradley, “Clinton To Order Reserves of Germ Weapon Antidotes,” *The Washington Post*, May 21, 1998, p. A1

¹⁵ Miller, Judith, “Defense Dept. to Spend Millions to Bolster Germ-Warfare Defense,” *The New York Times*, May 22, 1998, p. A18.)

¹⁶ Miller, Judith and Broad, William J. “Exercise Finds U.S. Unable To Handle Germ Warfare Threat,” *The New York Times*, April 26, 1998, Pg. A1; William J. Broad and Judith Miller, “THE WORLD: LIVE AMMO; The Threat of Germ Weapons Is Rising. Fear, Too, pg. A1)

¹⁷ Suro, Roberto, “U.S. Lacking in Terrorism Defenses; Study Cites a Need To Share Intelligence, *The Washington Post*, April 24, 1998 p. A1.)

¹⁸ No byline, “Military Adding 10 ‘Chem-Bio’ Response Teams,” *The Washington Post*, March 18, 1998, p. A3)

¹⁹ Lippman, Thomas W., “Clinton Pushes new U.S. Security Focus,” *The Washington Post*, May 23, 1998, p. A3.)

²⁰ Fehr, Stephen C. , “Major Disaster Drill Planned for D.C. Area; Focus To Be on Chemical, Germ Threats, *The Washington Post*, July 2, 1998, p. A12.)

²¹ Petrov, Vladimir, emeritus professor of international relations at George Washington University, Letter to the Editor, *The Washington Post*, February 14, 1998, p. A28)

²² Vernon Loeb and Walter Pincus, “Bomb Suspect Has been A Target; Aides Say Bin Laden Had Motive, Means to Attack Embassies, *The Washington Post*, August 13, 1998, p. A1; Kamran Khan and Pamela Constable, “Bomb Suspect Details Anti-U.S. Terror Force; Muslim Radical Said to Lead Thousands,” *The Washington Post*, August 19, 1998, p. A1; Howard Schneider and Nora Boustany, “A Barrage of Criticism in Mideast; U.S. Accused of ‘State Terrorism’ “ *The Washington Post*, August 21, 1998, p. A1.

²³ Perlez, Jane “AFTER THE ATTACKS: IN SUDAN; A Moderate Thinks U.S. Shot Itself in Foot, *The New York Times*, August 25, 1999, p. A6.)

²⁴ Miller, Judith and Broad, William J. "Clinton Describes Terrorism Threat for 21st Century," *The New York Times*, January 22, 1999, Pg. A1)

²⁵ Charles Babington, "Clinton Plans Training for Firefighters on Terrorism," *The Washington Post*, March 16, 1999, p. A11

²⁶Weiser, Benjamin, "Death threats Against Mayor Said to Rise," *The New York Times*, October 6, 1999, Pg. B1)

²⁷ Rosenfeld, Stephen, "Hard Choices in Homeland Defense," *The Washington Post*, March 5, 1999, p. A33.)

²⁸ Cooper, Kenneth J. "Muslim Militants Threaten American Lives," *The Washington Post*, March 7, 1999, p. A21; Loeb, Vernon, "Bin Laden Still Seen as Threat; U.S. Harassment Campaign May Backfire, Boost Fugitive's Image," *The Washington Post*, July 29, 1999

²⁹ Weiner, Tim "U.S. Hard Put to Find Proof bin Laden Directed Attacks," *The New York Times*, April 13, 1999, p A1

³⁰ Melton, R.H. "Panel Criticizes U.S. Anti-Terrorism Preparedness," *The Washington Post*, December 16

³¹ Adams, Lorraine and. Vise, David A. "Border Arrests Yield Little Calm; Scope of Possible Terrorism Threat Remains Unknown; Probe is Far-Flung," *The Washington Post*, January 10, 2000, p. A3.

³² Dobbs, Michael, "An Obscure Chief in U.S. War on Terror," *The Washington Post*, April 2, 2000, Pg. A1

³³ Lancaster, John, "U.S. Study Finds Terrorist shift to South Asia," *The Washington Post*, May 2, 2000, p. A24

³⁴ Vise, David A. "Panel Calls for Creating Counterterrorism Agency," *The Washington Post*, December 15, 2000, p. A8

³⁵ Loeb, Vernon "Global Threats Against U.S. Will Rise, Report Predicts; Experts Assess Future world Conflicts, Economic Trends," *The Washington Post*, December 18, 2000, p. A3

³⁶ Loeb, Vernon, "Terrorism Panel Faulted for Exaggeration," *The Washington Post*, June 23, 2000, p. A29.

³⁷ The Hart-Rudman Commission (The U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century) was one of three blue-ribbon commissions studying the threat of terrorism to the U.S. The others were the so-called Bremer Commission (named for Ambassador L. Paul Bremer and officially the National Commission on Terrorism) and the Gilmore Commission (named for former Virginia Governor James S. Gilmore III and officially the Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction. The Bremer group issued a report in June, 2000, the Gilmore Commission issued reports in December of 1999 and 2000, and Hart-Rudman issued reports in 1999, 2000 and 2001. All made recommendations for improvements in federal government organization and policy, though Hart-Rudman was arguably the most comprehensive.

³⁸ Engelberg, Stephen, "One Man and a Global Web of Violence," *The New York Times*, January 14, 2001, p. A1.

³⁹ Miller, Judith, "Killing for the Glory of God, In a Land Far From Home," *The New York Times*, January 16, 2001, p. A1.

⁴⁰ Schieffer made the remark at a conference at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. on February 6, 2002, “Rudman-Hart Commission Warns of Terrorist Attack: Why Did the News Media Ignore It?” Brigitte L. Nacos of Columbia University, who has done extensive research on media coverage of terrorism, including television, noted in a March, 2002, paper, “Most news organizations (prior to 9/11) simply did not buy the premise that international terrorism was a major threat unless there were specific alerts for explicit time periods as was the case with the Y2K predictions.”

⁴¹ These were keywords for the search used most frequently in this research.

⁴² Weiser, Benjamin, “Trial Poked Holes in Image of bin Laden’s Terror Group,” *The New York Times*, May 31, 2001, p. A1.

⁴³ Nexis search using “terrorism” or “terrorist” and “threat” for each newspaper.

⁴⁴ Crenshaw, Martha, “Terrorism, Strategies and Grand Strategies: Domestic or Structural Constraints?” presented at the International Studies Association Convention, March 24-27, 2002, New Orleans, LA.

⁴⁵ Sloan, Stephen, “Terrorism: How Vulnerable Is the United States,” *Terrorism: National Security Policy and the Home Front*, The Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College, May, 1995

⁴⁶ Huntington, Samuel P., “The Clash of Civilizations,” Touchstone Books 1996, P. 184

⁴⁷ Carter, Bill and Barringer, Felicity, “Networks Agree to U.S. Request To Edit Future bin Laden Tapes,” *The New York Times*, October 11, 2001, p. A1

⁴⁸ Among the pieces done in *The Atlantic Monthly* were: “Thinking about Terrorism” by Conor Cruise O’Brien, June, 1986; “The Roots of Muslim Rage” by Bernard Lewis,

September, 1990; “Blowback” by Mary Anne Weaver, May, 1996; “The Counterterrorist Myth” by Reuel Marc Gerecht, July/August, 2001.

Author’s note: The title of this paper, “While America Slept,” appeared as a cover line in Time Magazine’s edition of May 27, 2002. For the record, as my colleagues at the Shorenstein Center can attest, I chose this title for my paper at the time of our first internal presentations in early February.