

SPEAKING NOTES

FOR

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“Dispatches from the War on Terror”

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**“There is no terror in the bang,
only in the anticipation of it.”**

--- Alfred Hitchcock

People of my generation all know where we were when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22nd, 1963. Today, another, younger generation, will forever remember where they were on September 11th, 2001, when the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington were attacked by three airplanes that had been hijacked by 19 *ihadis*, many of them well-educated, middle-class men from Saudi Arabia.

Shortly after that extraordinary day, the administration of President George W. Bush quickly decided those attacks were nothing less than the opening shots in a new world conflict they named the Global War on Terror (or GWOT, in Pentagon-ese).

If you are interested in a blow-by-blow description of what happened inside the White House on 9/11, I recommend you read the first chapter of Richard Clarke's book, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror*. Clarke's account is gripping. On page 28 of his book, Clarke recounts one of the first pieces of advice he gave President Bush within hours of the 9/11 attacks. Here is what he claims to have said to one of his senior bureaucratic colleagues that fateful day:

“Mike, I told the President about the minimum-wage rent-a-cops doing screening of [airline] passengers and carry-on. [The President]

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understands that will all have to end.”

The federal government in Ottawa came to the same conclusion. As a result, Canada’s principal response to 9/11 was the creation of the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority --- or CATSA, for short --- the Crown Corporation that I set up and headed for three years, until March 31st of last year. In the legislation establishing CATSA, Parliament appropriated approximately \$2 billion for the corporation’s first five years of operation which will end in just over one year from now.

CATSA was nothing less than the first multi-billion dollar operating Crown Corporation to have been established in Ottawa in decades. As such, it was a huge challenge to build it from scratch. Today, CATSA directly or indirectly employs about 4000 people.

At the moment, as required by its founding legislation, CATSA is being formally reviewed by a three-person panel that was appointed late last year by the then Minister of Transport, Hon. Jean Lapierre. The review, which is scheduled to be completed by mid-summer of this year, will tell the federal government how CATSA has done and will make recommendations on how CATSA’s functions might be better performed in future.

CATSA’s original corporate goals were to hire and train the best pre-board screeners anywhere; to buy and install the best explosive detection machines in the world for the baggage of passengers that goes in the holds of aircraft in Canada; to work with the RCMP to create a well-trained force of Airline Protective Officers (APOs) to perform the same functions as airline “marshals” in the United States; to assist Canadian airports in paying for policing functions at airports; and to provide non-passenger screening services.

Shortly after its creation, the Minister of Transport gave CATSA the additional responsibility of creating and implementing a Restricted Area Identification Card (RAIC) system for all those having

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access to the airside of all Canadian airports, using fingerprint and biometric techniques and technology for identifying the card-holders.

My government oath of secrecy --- by which I am still bound -- - prevents me today from reporting to you in exquisite detail on CATSA's achievements. Unlike the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) in the United States, CATSA does not reveal its security standards; does not reveal the results of secret "penetration tests" on its screening points; does not tell the public when programs such as EDS or RAICs have been fully implemented; and so on. But I am allowed to tell you that CATSA is among the best agencies in the world of its kind in performing all of its very important functions. Canada meets and, in most cases, exceeds the international standards imposed on us by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

[The best news I have today is that there have been no attacks by violent extremists of any stripe on Canadian (or American) airports or airlines since 9/11 --- four-and-a-half years ago. Does this mean that the creation of CATSA, and the many other extraordinary measures taken by the Canadian and American governments since 9/11, have worked so well that we can all now relax, and stop spending so much passenger-paid money on airline and airport security. Unfortunately, we do not have that luxury.

As a leading American expert in security systems, Bruce Scheier, said in his recent book, *"Beyond Fear"*,

"An insecure system can exist for years before anyone notices its insecurity. Just because your house hasn't been broken into in decades doesn't mean it's secure. It might mean simply that no one has ever tried to break in, or it might mean that dozens have tried to break in and, without your ever knowing it, given up in failure. Both of these situations look exactly the same."

In the light of this observation by a lifelong expert in security systems, we have to ask whether we now have the best system in place. Or have we built a 21st century Maginot Line --- the last word in border security in the 1930s -- at our airports? Could an imaginative violent extremist go around our newly-hardened airport security systems as easily as Hitler's armies got around the Maginot Line in 1940? The "harder" you make one part of the system, the "softer" another part becomes.

That's what two young Chechnya women suicide bombers did in 2004 when they downed two Russian airliners within minutes of each other. The North American media did not report this event very extensively when it happened nor did the press shine a spotlight on the scramble by the TSA and CATSA to plug a new hole in airport security by installing "puffer" machines that would detect trace explosives or plastique-type explosives on the persons of passengers passing through North American screening points.

Hurricane Katrina also shocked Americans as much as 9/11 did because it indirectly demonstrated not only how vulnerable the levees of New Orleans were to a major storm but also showed potential extremists what they might have achieved with a few carefully placed explosives.

But let me return to Square One and the broad policy issues. Security policy, like any other policy or regulatory change that is rolled out in panic following a tragic or horrendous event, must be revisited as soon as the panic passes --- or following an intervening crisis of another kind.

Governments in both Canada and the U.S. are currently reviewing the effectiveness of the billions that have been spent on airport and airline security since 9/11. They are interested not only in judging the effectiveness of the money already spent but are asking whether future air transport security expenditures can be more finely tuned or whether some of

the air transport security money could be re-directed to other security priorities, such as seaports or urban transit. CATSA and the TSA are beginning to move towards a more sophisticated “risk management” model -- which should be less expensive –

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-- and away from the 100 per cent screening model that was put in place in the panic of the days and weeks following 9/11.

In the time I have remaining today, I’d like to go to the very top of the policy “food chain” and ask some serious questions about the framework within which all this new and expensive security has been set --- namely, the so-called “war on terror”. Asking these questions is all the more important today, now that 2300 Canadian soldiers have recently moved into harm’s way in Kandahar in Afghanistan as part of the “war of terror”.

Although terrorism has always existed in one form or another, as recently as 30 years ago there was little written or scholarly material about this phenomenon. However, as the American political historian Walter Laqueur wrote recently: “...during the past decade [writing about terrorism] has grown exponentially (amazon lists more than 5,500 books on the subject) and if one adds the literature on Iraq, Islamism and related topics, there is standing room only and not much of that either.” (*TLS*, 9 Dec 05, p. 3)

Many of these tomes have attempted, says Laqueur, “...to establish a general theory of terrorism and political violence. So far, no such theory has emerged and it is more than doubtful whether it ever will.” Those words, if true, are quite sobering to read as the United States, Canada and many other parts of the world struggle to understand an ever-growing threat of violent extremism in many parts of the world, particularly the Islamic part.

Because the shorthand term --- “war on terror” --- is used every day by politicians, newspapers, TV news channels and many of us, it is important that we try to define it as best we can. The author of “1984” and

“Animal Farm”, the great George Orwell, who often complained about the slovenly use of words in politics, would certainly agree with a serious attempt to get our arms around the meaning of “war on terror”. This is especially important because there are many who claim the terrorist threat

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will be with us for many, many years. Some even say that terrorism --- like true love or AIDs --- is forever.

As *The New Yorker*'s political editorialist, Hendrik Hertzberg, correctly said last month in his regular column:

“‘Terror’ is not a conquerable enemy or an end in itself. It is a method of achieving some political goal, however outlandish or unrealizable --- an ugly and frightening method, as was the bombing of civilian populations in the Second World War. But ‘war on terror’ is a chimerical circle, like ‘war to end all wars’. Woodrow Wilson’s war to end all wars defeated imperial Germany, but it did not and could not, defeat war. Nor can a war on terror defeat terror.”

Last year, the Bush administration --- which has won two crucial elections by claiming to be the best at fighting the “war on terror” --- flirted with the idea of using a more accurate description of what it, and the world, were fighting. Donald Rumsfeld and General Myers, the then-head of the Joint Chiefs, said a more accurate phrase would be “The Global Struggle Against Violent Extremism” --- or G-SAVE. That suggestion was quickly shot down by George Bush himself. Bush wants to be a “war president” and didn’t want to be known as a “struggle president”.

In the end, to be at “war” with “terrorism” is like being at “war” with cancer, or poverty, or the drug lords. It is a battle, not against a conventional enemy --- like another country --- but a “war” against an abstract noun.

The “war on terror” is a political slogan. “Terror” is a tactic or a metaphor. The words “war on terror” do not represent a policy.

Accordingly, anyone who declares war against this abstract noun may have an agenda that demands closer scrutiny. For example, a

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conventional war usually involves large-scale sacrifice by citizens and the curtailment of civil liberties. Because this curtailment is seen by citizens to be a temporary phenomenon, people accept it. If, however, the “war on terror” is predicted to be perpetual, the case for suspension of civil liberties, or the disregarding of international law, must be overwhelming.

Defining the true nature of the “war on terror” is also important in order to know, somewhere down the trail, when victory has been won. Because the violent extremist threat is decentralized and worldwide, I believe it cannot be won by military methods. But this is the methodology the U.S.-led “coalition of the willing” has chosen in Iraq and NATO/the UN have chosen in Afghanistan. As a counterterrorism strategy, history tells us traditional military techniques will not work. “The coalition of the willing” is committed to a strategy that is more appropriate for fighting states rather than scattered bands of non-state-connected extremists who may or may not be operating under the potent brand-name of “al-Qaeda”. The best counterterrorism offence is therefore more likely to be a good defence.

I believe the invasion of Iraq has played into the hands of the extremists and that this largely military mission could still end in tears. The question today for Canadians is whether the recent deployment of our soldiers to Kandahar is an Iraq-like strategy that will lead to a new insurgency there rather than a modern democracy.

A good warning letter from a former Canadian ambassador to Afghanistan --- Albertan Bill Warden --- was published on March 6th in *The Globe and Mail*. Warden was commenting on chief of the defence staff, General Rick Hillier’s, description of the Canadian mission. Here’s what Warden wrote:

“...if [General Hillier] believes that ‘Canadian values’ can be

imposed on Afghanistan over a period of 10 or even 40 years by a white Christian occupying force, he must be dreaming. Change can and will occur, but it will not be through Canadian

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aid administered at the point of a gun. More likely is that the foreign military presence over a longer term will simply fuel nationalism and religious fundamentalism, strengthening the very trends we are trying to combat.”

In short, this kind of mission may well fail. And that kind of possibility dictates that, sooner or later, the deployment must be debated in Parliament. Not now, when we are in the early stages of a difficult situation but certainly before we commit for a full 10 years, as General Hillier suggested we may.

Having said all this, there is no question in my mind --- having been at the “front” of the so-called “war on terror” for nearly four years --- that the asymmetrical struggle we are currently engaged in is serious business. Those of us who are the potential targets of violent extremists --- and make no mistake, Canada is on the lists of some of these people --- must continue to seek out and disrupt the activities of these dangerous folks. But we should prefer an intelligence-based, police-like approach to the struggle rather than relying on a military model. And we should not be distracted at home by events in Iraq or Afghanistan --- or even London or Madrid --- from the critical ongoing task of identifying and protecting our most vulnerable domestic targets.

When compiling a list of our most vulnerable domestic targets, we must start by acknowledging that government or private resources for the protection of potential targets are not limitless. Accordingly, we must be fairly ruthless in choosing where limited security money will be spent. To do that, we must engage in a rigorous review of risk and need. Some common assets will have to be “protected” while the less important ones will have to be “insured”.

The transportation sector will probably continue to be the first line of defence simply because violent extremists have always had a *penchant* for hijacking and blowing up passenger airliners or bombing

commuter or subway trains. Their reason for choosing these targets is not difficult to fathom: extremists look for concentrations of innocent civilians who can be attacked, or killed. By doing that, they attract widespread

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media coverage of the carnage, thus creating their desired climate of fear. We may even get to the point eventually where it will be illegal to broadcast news of some of these attacks. Taking away the oxygen of the media will infringe on peoples' right to know the news, but it may be a price worth paying.

The question I am frequently asked is: who is winning the “war on terror”? Sadly, on the basis of pure economics and the disruption in western societies, I must tell you the bad guys are doing very well. Their ROI --- return on investment --- in many cases has been spectacular. The 9/11 attack cost the 19 hijackers about US\$500,000 to plan, prepare for and execute. The cost in lives lost, building destroyed and of new government initiatives in the U.S. alone --- and not counting the cost of the war in Iraq -- - amounts to at least \$50 billion --- and still counting. The Madrid killing of 199 commuters cost next to nothing --- and the jihadis didn't even have to die. If you add in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, you are into the hundreds of billions of dollars and tens of thousands of deaths. So, terrorism has “worked” for the terrorists.

Because terrorism, a.k.a. violent extremism, has often worked throughout history, we cannot stop trying to understand its roots causes even though, as I quoted Laqueur saying earlier, we may never be able to find a general theory to explain how these killers and suicide bombers tick. It may well be that what we are currently experiencing is a cyclical phenomenon that rises and falls with the times, like a dreadful virus. If that is true, then the worst thing we could do is to radically change society and our lifestyles in order to appease these marginal people. In the end, the famous words of Franklin D. Roosevelt may be the most comforting ones for us to remember always as we continue this struggle: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

Only by surrendering to fear will we lose our civilization and our souls. And keep remembering what the great Hitchcock said: “There is no terror in the bang, only in the anticipation of it.”