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Kerry's Undeclared War

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As New York and Washington were under attack on Sept. 11, 2001, a film crew happened to come upon John Kerry leaving the Capitol. The brief moment of footage, included in a BBC documentary called "Clear the Skies," tells us something, perhaps, about Kerry in a crisis. The camera captures Congressional aides and visitors, clearly distraught and holding onto one another, streaming down the back steps of the Capitol building in near panic, following the bellowed instructions of anxious police. Off to one side of the screen, there is Kerry, alone, his long legs carrying him calmly down the steps, his neck craning toward the sky, as if he were watching a gathering rainstorm. His face and demeanor appear unworried. Kerry could be a man lost in his thoughts who just happens to have wandered onto the set of a disaster film.

"I remember looking up at the sky as I walked down the steps," Kerry told me recently, when I asked him about the film clip. He said that he and other members of the Senate's Democratic leadership had just watched on television as the second plane hit the World Trade Center, and shortly after that they heard the sonic boom of an explosion and saw, through a large window, the black smoke rise from the Pentagon. "We'd had some warning that there was some airplane in the sky. And I remember seeing a great big plane -- I think it was a 747 or something -- up there, but it wasn't moving in a way that, you know, I was particularly concerned. I remember feeling a rage, a huge anger, and I remember turning to somebody and saying, 'This is war.' I said, 'This is an act of war.'"

After leaving the Capitol on that terrible day, Kerry walked across the street to his office in the Russell Senate building, where he made sure that his staff had been evacuated and was safe. Reluctant to leave Capitol Hill, he watched TV coverage in his office and saw the second tower fall. He called his older daughter, Alexandra, who was living in New York, and his wife, Teresa, who was in Washington. Those who saw Kerry that morning recall mainly that he was furious, an emotion, those close to him say, that comes easily to him in times of trial. He thought it was a mistake to shut down the Capitol, to show terrorists that they had the power to send the United States government into hiding.

"You know, my instinct was, Where's my gun?" Kerry told me. "How do you fight back? I wanted to do something." That evening, sitting at home, he called an aide and said he wanted to go to New York that very night to help the rescuers; he was ultimately convinced that such a trip was logistically impossible. In the days ahead, Kerry would make two trips to ground zero to see what remained of the carnage.

With the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the geopolitical currents that Washington had spent half a century mastering shifted all at once. It isn't clear how long it took Kerry -- a senator for nearly 20 years and, in September 2001, an undeclared candidate for the presidency -- to understand the political magnitude of that change. George W. Bush and his advisers got it almost instantly. Few men get to be president, and far fewer get to be president at a critical, transformative moment; Bush, seizing the opportunity, recast himself as the accidental protagonist of a new and dramatic national narrative. Less than a year removed from a disputed election, he set about elbowing his way into the small pantheon of modern presidents -- F.D.R. after Pearl Harbor, Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis -- who led the nation in profound moments of peril.

Before the smoke had even dissipated over Manhattan, Bush presented the country with an ambitious, overarching construct for a new era in foreign relations. "The war on terror," as he put it, was this generation's test of military

and ideological resolve, different from the ones that came before with regard to tactics, perhaps, but not in the magnitude of the challenges or the ambition of the enemy. Bush explained that Al Qaeda and its allies and imitators would constitute a new kind of menace in the years ahead, stealthier and less predictable than past enemies. And yet, in their opposition to American principles and the threat they posed to the nation, he suggested, the Islamic terrorists were the equivalent of Hitler and Stalin, and defeating them would require the same steel and the same conviction that guided America in the last century's campaigns.

While Bush and much of the country seemed remade by the historic events of 9/11, Democrats in Washington were slow to understand that the attacks had to change them in some way too. What adjustments they made were, at first, defensive. Spooked by Bush's surging popularity and the nation's suddenly ascendant mood of patriotism, Democrats stifled their instinctive concerns over civil liberties; and whatever their previous misgivings about intervention, many Congressional Democrats, a year after the terrorist attacks, voted to give Bush the authority to invade Iraq.

What few Democrats did at the time was think creatively about the new world of foreign policy. The candidates who began their runs for the presidency last year, from Dennis Kucinich and his peace platform on the left to Joe Lieberman and Dick Gephardt on the other side of the spectrum, attacked the president's foreign policy from different directions, but if any new ideas emerged during those months, they were soon drowned out by the booming anti-war voice of Howard Dean. When Kerry emerged as the most palatable alternative, he at first ran mostly on the viability of his personal story, focusing more on his combat experience in Vietnam than on any plan to fight Al Qaeda or remake Iraq. Only since Labor Day has Kerry begun to sharpen his distinctions with Bush on national security and foreign policy. In a series of combative speeches and statements, and in a crisp performance at the first head-to-head debate, Kerry has argued that Bush's war in Iraq is a disaster, that troops should be brought home before the end of the next presidential term and that the Iraq war is a "profound diversion" from the war on terror and the real showdown with Al Qaeda.

What Kerry still has not done is to articulate clearly a larger foreign-policy vision, his own overarching alternative to Bush's global war on terror. The difference between the two men was clear during the foreign-policy debate in Florida 10 days ago. Kerry seemed dominant for much of the exchange, making clear arguments on a range of specific challenges -- the war in Iraq, negotiations with North Korea, relations with Russia. But while Kerry bore in on ground-level details, Bush, in defending his policies, seemed, characteristically, to be looking at the world from a much higher altitude, repeating in his brief and sometimes agitated statements a single unifying worldview: America is the world's great force for freedom, unsparing in its use of pre-emptive might and unstinting in its determination to stamp out tyranny and terrorism. Kerry seemed to offer no grand thematic equivalent.

Inside liberal think-tanks, there are Democratic foreign-policy experts who are challenging some of Bush's most basic assumptions about the post-9/11 world -- including, most provocatively, the very idea that we are, in fact, in a war. But Kerry has tended to steer clear of this conversation, preferring to attack Bush for the way he is fighting terrorism rather than for the way in which he perceives and frames the threat itself.

The argument going on in Washington has its roots in the dark years of the cold war. Just about everyone agrees that many factors contributed to America's triumph over world communism -- but people differ on which of those factors were most important. The neo-conservatives who shaped Reagan's anti-Soviet policy and now shape Bush's war on terror have long held that the "twilight struggle" with the Soviet empire was won primarily as a result of U.S. military intervention in several hemispheres and of Reagan's massive arms buildup, without which democracy and free markets could not have taken hold. Many liberals, on the other hand, have never been comfortable with that premise; while they acknowledge that American military power played a role, they contend that the long ideological struggle with communism ended chiefly because the stifling economic and social tenets of Marxism were unsustainable, and because a new leader emerged -- Mikhail Gorbachev -- who understood that. They see Islamic fanaticism, similarly, as a repressive ideology, born of complex societal conditions, that won't be defeated by any predominately military solution.

In the liberal view, the enemy this time -- an entirely new kind of "non-state actor" known as Al Qaeda -- more closely resembles an especially murderous drug cartel than it does the vaunted Red Army. Instead of military

might, liberal thinkers believe, the moment calls for a combination of expansive diplomacy abroad and interdiction at home, an effort more akin to the war on drugs than to any conventional war of the last century.

Even Democrats who stress that combating terrorism should include a strong military option argue that the "war on terror" is a flawed construct. "We're not in a war on terror, in the literal sense," says Richard Holbrooke, the Clinton-era diplomat who could well become Kerry's secretary of state. "The war on terror is like saying 'the war on poverty.' It's just a metaphor. What we're really talking about is winning the ideological struggle so that people stop turning themselves into suicide bombers."

These competing philosophies, neo-conservative and liberal, aren't mutually exclusive, of course. Neo-cons will agree that military operations are just one facet, albeit the main one, of their response to terrorism. And liberals are almost unanimous in their support for military force when the nation or its allies face an imminent and preventable threat; not only did the vast majority of liberal policy makers support the invasion of Afghanistan, but many also thought it should have been pursued more aggressively. Still, the philosophical difference between the two camps, applied to a conflict that may well last a generation, is both deep and distinct. Fundamentally, Bush sees the war on terror as a military campaign, not simply to protect American lives but also to preserve and spread American values around the world; his liberal critics see it more as an ideological campaign, one that will turn back a tide of resentment toward Americans and thus limit the peril they face at home.

Perhaps the most pressing question of the presidential campaign is where John Kerry stands in this debate. The man who would be the first Vietnam veteran to occupy the Oval Office has doggedly tried to merge both worldviews, repeatedly vowing to fight both a more fierce and a more restrained, multifaceted war on terror. Aides say this is evidence of his capacity to envision complex solutions for a complex world; voters, through the summer and early fall, seemed less impressed. In a typical poll conducted by The Washington Post and ABC News just before the first presidential debate, only 37 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement that Kerry would make the country safer. A New York Times/CBS News poll conducted in mid-September found that half the respondents thought Bush would make the right decisions to protect the nation from terrorism, compared with only 26 percent who said the same thing about Kerry.

More surprising than the poll numbers, though, is the sense of frustration, expressed not just by voters but by some in Kerry's own party, that even at this late hour, Kerry's long-term strategy for defeating the terrorists remains so ethereal. "You will lose, and we will win," Kerry told America's enemies in the most memorable line of his convention speech in late July. "The future doesn't belong to fear. It belongs to freedom." But how will we win? How do you root out and destroy Islamic radicals while at the same time capturing the "hearts and minds" of Islamic students? When John Kerry said, on Sept. 11, 2001, "This is war," what precisely did he mean?

On an evening in August, just after a campaign swing through the Southwest, Kerry and I met, for the second of three conversations about terrorism and national security, in a hotel room overlooking the Ferris wheel on the Santa Monica pier. A row of Evian water bottles had been thoughtfully placed on a nearby table. Kerry frowned.

"Can we get any of my water?" he asked Stephanie Cutter, his communications director, who dutifully scurried from the room. I asked Kerry, out of sheer curiosity, what he didn't like about Evian.

"I hate that stuff," Kerry explained to me. "They pack it full of minerals."

"What kind of water do you drink?" I asked, trying to make conversation.

"Plain old American water," he said.

"You mean tap water?"

"No," Kerry replied deliberately. He seemed now to sense some kind of trap. I was left to imagine what was going through his head. *If I admit that I drink bottled water, then he might say I'm out of touch with ordinary voters. But doesn't*

demanding my own brand of water seem even more aristocratic? Then again, Evian is French -- important to stay away from anything even remotely French.

"There are all kinds of waters," he said finally. Pause. "Saratoga Spring." This seemed to have exhausted his list. "Sometimes I drink tap water," he added.

After months of having his every word scrutinized by reporters and mocked by Republicans, Kerry appeared to sense danger in the most mundane of places. Interviewing him reminded me at times of what I'd read in "Tour of Duty," the historian Douglas Brinkley's flattering account of Kerry's service in Vietnam. The Swift boat crews on the Mekong Delta and the Ca Mau Peninsula did not aspire to be heroic, although they were. Kerry and the young sailors were given patrol missions that seemed unnecessarily dangerous; their job was essentially to prove the point that Americans could traverse the windy rivers of the delta, rife with Vietcong, and lure the enemy out into the open. They traveled slowly and kept watch in all directions, and if their leader got them from point A to point B and back again without serious casualties, he had done his job.

Kerry seems to find presidential politics in the era of Karl Rove as treacherous as riverine warfare, and he has run for the presidency in much the same way. From the beginning, Kerry's advisers said that the election would be principally a referendum on Bush, whose approval ratings, reflecting public anxiety over Iraq and a sluggish economy, were consistently low for a president seeking re-election. All Kerry had to do to win, the thinking went, was to meet a basic threshold of acceptability with voters and avoid doing or saying anything that might be fatally stupid. The riverbanks were lined with hostile Republicans and reporters, lying in wait for him, and Kerry's goal as he sailed upriver was simple: Stay down. Exercise caution. Get to November in one piece.

Which is exactly what it's like to interview Kerry as he runs for the presidency; he acts as if you've been sent to destroy him, and he can't quite figure out why in the world he should be sitting across from you. When I met him for our first conversation, in his cabin aboard the 757 that shuttles his campaign around the country, Kerry didn't extend his hand or even look up to greet me when I entered, and he grew so quickly and obviously exasperated with my questions about his thoughts and votes on Iraq that he cut the interview short. (Embarrassed aides later told me he had been abruptly roused from a nap.) He was far more gracious in our subsequent conversations about terrorism and foreign policy, but he still spent a lot of the time repeating phrases from his stump speech. ("You will lose, we will win," and so on.) What some politicians -- Bill Clinton comes to mind -- might have considered an opportunity to persuade and impress voters, Kerry seemed to regard only as an invitation to do himself harm.

Kerry's guardedness has contributed to the impression that he does not think clearly or boldly about foreign policy. In his short but fascinating book titled "Surprise, Security and the American Experience," the Yale historian John Lewis Gaddis suggests that Bush's framework for fighting terrorism has its roots in the lofty, idealistic tradition of John Quincy Adams and Woodrow Wilson. (The book was so popular in the White House that Gaddis was invited over for a discussion.) "What Bush is proposing is quite long-term, quite radical and quite Wilsonian," Gaddis told me when we spoke; when I asked him about Kerry, he said: "I don't know where Kerry is on this. I don't have the slightest clue."

Kerry's adversaries have found it easy to ridicule his views on foreign policy, suggesting that his idea of counterterrorism is simply to go around arresting all the terrorists. This is what Dick Cheney was getting at when he said last month that there was a danger, should Kerry be elected, that "we'll fall back into the pre-9/11 mind-set, if you will, that in fact these terrorist attacks are just criminal acts, and that we're not really at war." These barbs have some resonance, largely because Kerry is so obviously defensive about them; talking to him, you sometimes get the sense that he would gladly throw on a pair of night-vision goggles and abduct a member of his own staff if he thought it would prove he could be as tough on terror as his opponent. (When I asked one Kerry adviser what it was that voters needed to know about Kerry and terrorism, he replied without hesitation. "That he's strong and tough," he said. "In the case of John Kerry, unlike Dick Cheney and George W. Bush, he's looked people in the face and shot them dead.")

It's perhaps not surprising, then, that Kerry hasn't been eager to challenge Bush's grand notion of a war on terror;

such a distinction might sound weak, equivocal or, worse yet, nuanced. It's equally unsurprising that, in the recent Times poll, 57 percent of the respondents said Kerry hadn't made his plans for the country clear, and 63 percent believed he said what he thought people wanted to hear, rather than what he actually thought. This reflected savage Republican attacks on Kerry's character, to be sure, but it probably also had something to do with the fact that he hadn't made his plans clear and seemed to be saying what he thought people wanted to hear.

When I asked Kerry's campaign advisers about these poll numbers, what I heard from some of them in response was that Kerry's theories on global affairs were just too complex for the electorate and would have been ignored -- or, worse yet, mangled -- by the press. "Yes, he should have laid out this issue and many others in greater detail and with more intellectual creativity, there's no question," one adviser told me. "But it would have had no effect."

This is, of course, a common Democratic refrain: Republicans sound more coherent because they see the world in such a rudimentary way, while Democrats, 10 steps ahead of the rest of the country, wrestle with profound policy issues that don't lend themselves to slogans. By this reasoning, any proposal that can be explained concisely to voters is, by definition, ineffective and lacking in gravitas. Other Kerry aides blame the candidate and his coterie of message makers, most of whom are legendary for their attack ads but less adept at thinking about broad policy arguments. "If you talk about this the right way, then the American people, or most of them, will get it," one of Kerry's informal advisers told me. "But you've got to have guts."

This is the Republican line on Kerry -- that he lacks guts. Kerry's often wobbly attempt to be both like and unlike Bush in his approach to terrorism and the war in Iraq enabled the Bush team, by the time Kerry and I spoke in August, to portray him, devastatingly, as a "flip-flopper" who careens from one position to another. In our conversation, Kerry seemed unusually sensitive to these allegations, to the point where he seemed unwilling to admit to having evolved or grown in the way that politicians -- or human beings, for that matter -- generally do. When I asked Kerry how Sept. 11 had changed him, either personally or politically, he seemed to freeze for a moment.

"It accelerated -- " He paused. "I mean, it didn't change me much at all. It just sort of accelerated, confirmed in me, the urgency of doing the things I thought we needed to be doing. I mean, to me, it wasn't as transformational as it was a kind of anger, a frustration and an urgency that we weren't doing the kinds of things necessary to prevent it and to deal with it."

Kerry did allow that he, like other Americans, felt less safe after 9/11. "Look, until a few months ago," he said, referring to the time before he was enveloped in a Secret Service escort and whisked around on charter planes, "I was flying like everybody else, you know, going through things. Absolutely, I've looked at people very carefully on an airplane. I'd look at shoes. I'd check people who I thought might be a little squirrely. Going into crowded events, I feel very much on the alert."

Bush attacked Kerry earlier in the campaign over this question of whether the war on terror was really a war. ("My opponent indicated that he's not comfortable using the word 'war' to describe the struggle we're in," Bush said, although whether Kerry had actually said that is debatable.) Now that I'd heard Holbrooke and others say flat out that we weren't in an actual war, I wanted to hear what Kerry thought. Is this a real war, or a metaphorical one? I asked him. Is "war" the right word to use?

"There's a danger in it," Kerry said, nodding. "But it's real," he went on, meaning the war itself. "You know, when your buildings are bombed and 3,000 people get killed, and airplanes are hijacked, and a nation is terrorized the way we were, and people continue to plot to do you injury, that's an act of war, and it's serious business. But it's a different kind of war. You have to understand that this is not the sands of Iwo Jima. This is a completely new, different kind of war from any we've fought previously."

Kerry told me he would stop terrorists by going after them ruthlessly with the military, and he faulted Bush, as he often does, for choosing to use Afghan militias, instead of American troops, to pursue Osama bin Laden into the mountains of Tora Bora, where he disappeared. "I'm certainly, you know, not going to take second seat to anybody, to nobody, in my willingness to seek justice and set America on a course -- to make America safe," Kerry

told me. "And that requires destroying terrorists. And I'm committed to doing that. But I think I have a better way of doing it. I can do it more effectively."

This was a word that Kerry came back to repeatedly in our discussions; he told me he would wage a more "effective" war on terror no less than 18 times in two hours of conversations. The question, of course, was how.

"I think we can do a better job," Kerry said, "of cutting off financing, of exposing groups, of working cooperatively across the globe, of improving our intelligence capabilities nationally and internationally, of training our military and deploying them differently, of specializing in special forces and special ops, of working with allies, and most importantly -- and I mean most importantly -- of restoring America's reputation as a country that listens, is sensitive, brings people to our side, is the seeker of peace, not war, and that uses our high moral ground and high-level values to augment us in the war on terror, not to diminish us."

This last point was what Kerry seemed to be getting at with his mantra of "effectiveness," and it was in fact the main thrust of his campaign pitch about terrorism. By infuriating allies and diminishing the country's international esteem, Kerry argued, Bush had made it impossible for America to achieve its goals abroad. By the simple act of changing presidents, the country would greatly increase its chances of success in the global war on terror. Both candidates, in fact, were suggesting that the main difference between them was one of leadership style and not policy; just as Bush had taken to arguing that Kerry was too inconstant to lead a nation at war, Kerry's critique centered on the idea that Bush had proved himself too stubborn and arrogant to represent America to the rest of the world.

But when you listen carefully to what Bush and Kerry say, it becomes clear that the differences between them are more profound than the matter of who can be more effective in achieving the same ends. Bush casts the war on terror as a vast struggle that is likely to go on indefinitely, or at least as long as radical Islam commands fealty in regions of the world. In a rare moment of either candor or carelessness, or perhaps both, Bush told Matt Lauer on the "Today" show in August that he didn't think the United States could actually triumph in the war on terror in the foreseeable future. "I don't think you can win it," he said -- a statement that he and his aides tried to disown but that had the ring of sincerity to it. He and other members of his administration have said that Americans should expect to be attacked again, and that the constant shadow of danger that hangs over major cities like New York and Washington is the cost of freedom. In his rhetoric, Bush suggests that terrorism for this generation of Americans is and should be an overwhelming and frightening reality.

When I asked Kerry what it would take for Americans to feel safe again, he displayed a much less apocalyptic worldview. "We have to get back to the place we were, where terrorists are not the focus of our lives, but they're a nuisance," Kerry said. "As a former law-enforcement person, I know we're never going to end prostitution. We're never going to end illegal gambling. But we're going to reduce it, organized crime, to a level where it isn't on the rise. It isn't threatening people's lives every day, and fundamentally, it's something that you continue to fight, but it's not threatening the fabric of your life."

This analogy struck me as remarkable, if only because it seemed to throw down a big orange marker between Kerry's philosophy and the president's. Kerry, a former prosecutor, was suggesting that the war, if one could call it that, was, if not winnable, then at least controllable. If mobsters could be chased into the back rooms of seedy clubs, then so, too, could terrorists be sent scurrying for their lives into remote caves where they wouldn't harm us. Bush had continually cast himself as the optimist in the race, asserting that he alone saw the liberating potential of American might, and yet his dark vision of unending war suddenly seemed far less hopeful than Kerry's notion that all of this horror -- planes flying into buildings, anxiety about suicide bombers and chemicals in the subway -- could somehow be made to recede until it was barely in our thoughts.

Kerry came to his worldview over the course of a Senate career that has been, by any legislative standard, a quiet affair. Beginning in the late 80's, Kerry's Subcommittee on Terrorism, Narcotics and International Operations investigated and exposed connections between Latin American drug dealers and BCCI, the international bank that was helping to launder drug money. That led to more investigations of arms dealers, money laundering and

terrorist financing.

Kerry turned his work on the committee into a book on global crime, titled "The New War," published in 1997. He readily admitted to me that the book "wasn't exclusively on Al Qaeda"; in fact, it barely mentioned the rise of Islamic extremism. But when I spoke to Kerry in August, he said that many of the interdiction tactics that cripple drug lords, including governments working jointly to share intelligence, patrol borders and force banks to identify suspicious customers, can also be some of the most useful tools in the war on terror.

"Of all the records in the Senate, if you don't mind my saying, I think I was ahead of the curve on this entire dark side of globalization," he said. "I think that the Senate committee report on contras, narcotics and drugs, et cetera, is a seminal report. People have based research papers on it. People have based documents on it, movies on it. I think it was a significant piece of work."

More senior members of the foreign-relations committee, like Joe Biden and Richard Lugar, were far more visible and vocal on the emerging threat of Islamic terrorism. But through his BCCI investigation, Kerry did discover that a wide array of international criminals -- Latin American drug lords, Palestinian terrorists, arms dealers -- had one thing in common: they were able to move money around through the same illicit channels. And he worked hard, and with little credit, to shut those channels down.

In 1988, Kerry successfully proposed an amendment that forced the Treasury Department to negotiate so-called Kerry Agreements with foreign countries. Under these agreements, foreign governments had to promise to keep a close watch on their banks for potential money laundering or they risked losing their access to U.S. markets. Other measures Kerry tried to pass throughout the 90's, virtually all of them blocked by Republican senators on the banking committee, would end up, in the wake of 9/11, in the USA Patriot Act; among other things, these measures subject banks to fines or loss of license if they don't take steps to verify the identities of their customers and to avoid being used for money laundering.

Through his immersion in the global underground, Kerry made connections among disparate criminal and terrorist groups that few other senators interested in foreign policy were making in the 90's. Richard A. Clarke, who coordinated security and counterterrorism policy for George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, credits Kerry with having seen beyond the national-security tableau on which most of his colleagues were focused. "He was getting it at the same time that people like Tony Lake were getting it, in the '93-'94 time frame," Clarke says, referring to Anthony Lake, Clinton's national security adviser. "And the 'it' here was that there was a new nonstate-actor threat, and that nonstate-actor threat was a blended threat that didn't fit neatly into the box of organized criminal, or neatly into the box of terrorism. What you found were groups that were all of the above."

In other words, Kerry was among the first policy makers in Washington to begin mapping out a strategy to combat an entirely new kind of enemy. Americans were conditioned, by two world wars and a long standoff with a rival superpower, to see foreign policy as a mix of cooperation and tension between civilized states. Kerry came to believe, however, that Americans were in greater danger from the more shadowy groups he had been investigating -- nonstate actors, armed with cellphones and laptops -- who might detonate suitcase bombs or release lethal chemicals into the subway just to make a point. They lived in remote regions and exploited weak governments. Their goal wasn't to govern states but to destabilize them.

The challenge of beating back these nonstate actors -- not just Islamic terrorists but all kinds of rogue forces -- is what Kerry meant by "the dark side of globalization." He came closest to articulating this as an actual foreign-policy vision in a speech he gave at U.C.L.A. last February. "The war on terror is not a clash of civilizations," he said then. "It is a clash of civilization against chaos, of the best hopes of humanity against dogmatic fears of progress and the future."

This stands in significant contrast to the Bush doctrine, which holds that the war on terror, if not exactly a clash of civilizations, is nonetheless a struggle between those states that would promote terrorism and those that would exterminate it. Bush, like Kerry, accepts the premise that America is endangered mainly by a new kind of adversary that claims no state or political entity as its own. But he does not accept the idea that those adversaries can

ultimately survive and operate independently of states; in fact, he asserts that terrorist groups are inevitably the subsidiaries of irresponsible regimes. "We must be prepared to stop rogue states and their terrorist clients," the National Security Strategy said, in a typical passage, "before they are able to threaten or use weapons of mass destruction against the United States and our allies and friends."

By singling out three states in particular- Iraq, North Korea and Iran -- as an "axis of evil," and by invading Iraq on the premise that it did (or at least might) sponsor terrorism, Bush cemented the idea that his war on terror is a war against those states that, in the president's words, are not with us but against us. Many of Bush's advisers spent their careers steeped in cold-war strategy, and their foreign policy is deeply rooted in the idea that states are the only consequential actors on the world stage, and that they can -- and should -- be forced to exercise control over the violent groups that take root within their borders.

Kerry's view, on the other hand, suggests that it is the very premise of civilized states, rather than any one ideology, that is under attack. And no one state, acting alone, can possibly have much impact on the threat, because terrorists will always be able to move around, shelter their money and connect in cyberspace; there are no capitals for a superpower like the United States to bomb, no ambassadors to recall, no economies to sanction. The U.S. military searches for bin Laden, the Russians hunt for the Chechen terrorist Shamil Basayev and the Israelis fire missiles at Hamas bomb makers; in Kerry's world, these disparate terrorist elements make up a loosely affiliated network of diabolical villains, more connected to one another by tactics and ideology than they are to any one state sponsor. The conflict, in Kerry's formulation, pits the forces of order versus the forces of chaos, and only a unified community of nations can ensure that order prevails.

One can infer from this that if Kerry were able to speak less guardedly, in a less treacherous atmosphere than a political campaign, he might say, as some of his advisers do, that we are not in an actual war on terror. Wars are fought between states or between factions vying for control of a state; Al Qaeda and its many offspring are neither. If Kerry's foreign-policy frame is correct, then law enforcement probably is the most important, though not the only, strategy you can employ against such forces, who need passports and bank accounts and weapons in order to survive and flourish. Such a theory suggests that, in our grief and fury, we have overrated the military threat posed by Al Qaeda, paradoxically elevating what was essentially a criminal enterprise, albeit a devastatingly sophisticated and global one, into the ideological successor to Hitler and Stalin -- and thus conferring on the jihadists a kind of stature that might actually work in their favor, enabling them to attract more donations and more recruits.

This critical difference between the two men running for the presidency, over what kind of enemy we are fighting and how best to defeat it, is at the core of a larger debate over how the United States should involve itself in the Muslim world. Bush and Kerry are in agreement, as is just about every expert on Islamic culture you can find, that in order for Americans to live and travel securely, the United States must change the widespread perception among many Muslims worldwide that America is morally corrupt and economically exploitative. It is this resentment, felt especially strongly among Arab Muslims, that makes heroes of suicide bombers. The question vexing the foreign-policy establishment in Washington is how you market freedom. Is the establishment of a single, functioning democracy in the Middle East enough to win the "hearts and minds" of ordinary Muslims, by convincing them that America is in fact the model for a free, more open society? Or do you need to somehow strike at the underlying conditions -- despotism, hopelessness, economic and social repression -- that breed fundamentalism and violence in the first place?

"You've got to do something to acknowledge the gulf that exists between the dispossessed Arab world and us, because it's huge," says Bob Kerrey, the former Democratic senator who is now president of New School University and who served on the independent 9/11 commission. "We don't have enough money, we don't have enough parents who are willing to give up their sons and daughters, to win this with our Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. We don't have the bodies to do it. So if you don't have a real agenda of hope that's as hard-headed and tough as your military and law-enforcement agenda, we're not going to win this thing."

The neo-conservatives have advanced a viral theory of democracy. In their view, establishing a model democracy in the Arab world, by force if necessary, no matter how many years and lives it takes, would ultimately benefit not only the people of that country but also America too. A free and democratic Iraq, to take the favorite example, will

cause the people of other repressive countries in the region to rise up and demand American-style freedom, and these democratic nations will no longer be breeding pools for nihilistic terrorists. Like so much of Bush's policy, this kind of thinking harks directly back to the cold war. The domino theory that took hold during the 1950's maintained that an ideological change in one nation -- "going" communist or democratic -- could infect its neighbor; it was based in part on the idea that ideologies could be contagious.

Bush crystallized the new incarnation of this idea in his convention speech last month, notable for the unapologetic sweep and clarity of its vision. "The terrorists know that a vibrant, successful democracy at the heart of the Middle East will discredit their radical ideology of hate," the president said. "I believe in the transformational power of liberty. As the citizens of Afghanistan and Iraq seize the moment, their example will send a message of hope throughout a vital region. Palestinians will hear the message that democracy and reform are within their reach, and so is peace with our good friend Israel. Young women across the Middle East will hear the message that their day of equality and justice is coming. Young men will hear the message that national progress and dignity are found in liberty, not tyranny and terror."

Kerry, too, envisions a freer and more democratic Middle East. But he flatly rejects the premise of viral democracy, particularly when the virus is introduced at gunpoint. "In this administration, the approach is that democracy is the automatic, easily embraced alternative to every ill in the region," he told me. Kerry disagreed. "You can't impose it on people," he said. "You have to bring them to it. You have to invite them to it. You have to nurture the process."

Those who know Kerry say this belief is in part a reaction to his own experience in Vietnam, where one understanding of the domino theory ("if Vietnam goes communist, all of Asia will fall") led to the death of 58,000 Americans, and another ("the South Vietnamese crave democracy") ran up against the realities of life in a poor, long-war-ravaged country. The people of Vietnam, Kerry found, were susceptible neither to the dogma of communism nor the persuasiveness of American "liberation." As the young Kerry said during his 1971 testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: "We found most people didn't even know the difference between communism and democracy. They only wanted to work in rice paddies without helicopters strafing them and bombs with napalm burning their villages and tearing their country apart. They wanted everything to do with the war, particularly with this foreign presence of the United States of America, to leave them alone in peace."

Biden, who is perhaps Kerry's closest friend in the Senate, suggests that Kerry sees Bush's advisers as beholden to the same grand and misguided theories. "John and I never believed that, if you were successful in Iraq, you'd have governments falling like dominoes in the Middle East," he told me. "The neo-cons of today are 'the best and the brightest' who brought us Vietnam. They have taken a construct that's flawed and applied it to a world that isn't relevant."

In fact, Kerry and his advisers contend that the occupation of Iraq is creating a reverse contagion in the region; they say the fighting -- with its heavy civilian casualties and its pictures, beamed throughout the Arab world, of American aggression -- has been a boon to Al Qaeda recruiters. They frequently cite a Pentagon memo, leaked to the media last year, in which Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld wondered whether Al Qaeda was recruiting new terrorists faster than the U.S. military could capture or kill them. "God help us if we damage the shrine in Najaf," Richard Holbrooke told me on a day when marines surrounded insurgent Shiites inside the shrine, "and we create a new group of Shiites who some years from now blow up the Statue of Liberty or something like that, all because we destroyed the holiest site in Shiism."

If forced democracy is ultimately Bush's panacea for the ills that haunt the world, as Kerry suggests it is, then Kerry's is diplomacy. Kerry mentions the importance of cooperating with the world community so often that some of his strongest supporters wish he would ease up a bit. ("When people hear multilateral, they think multi-mush," Biden despaired.) But multilateralism is not an abstraction to Kerry, whose father served as a career diplomat during the years after World War II. The only time I saw Kerry truly animated during two hours of conversation was when he talked about the ability of a president to build relationships with other leaders.

"We need to engage more directly and more respectfully with Islam, with the state of Islam, with religious leaders, mullahs, imams, clerics, in a way that proves this is not a clash with the British and the Americans and the old forces they remember from the colonial days," Kerry told me during a rare break from campaigning, in Seattle at the end of August. "And that's all about your diplomacy."

When I suggested that effecting such changes could take many years, Kerry shook his head vehemently and waved me off.

"Yeah, it is long-term, but it can be dramatically effective in the short term. It really can be. I promise you." He leaned his head back and slapped his thighs. "A new presidency with the right moves, the right language, the right outreach, the right initiatives, can dramatically alter the world's perception of us very, very quickly.

"I know Mubarak well enough to know what I think I could achieve in the messaging and in the press in Egypt," Kerry went on. "And, similarly, with Jordan and with King Abdullah, and what we can do in terms of transformation in the economics of the region by getting American businesspeople involved, getting some stability and really beginning to proactively move in those ways. We just haven't been doing any of this stuff. We've been stunningly disengaged, with the exception of Iraq.

"I mean, you ever hear anything about the 'road map' anymore?" he asked, referring to the international plan for phasing in peace between Israel and the Palestinians, which Kerry supports. "No. You ever hear anything about anything anymore? No. Do you hear anything about this greater Middle East initiative, the concepts or anything? No. I think we're fighting a very narrow, myopic kind of war."

It is not a coincidence that Kerry's greatest success in the Senate came not during his long run of investigations but in the realm of diplomacy. He and John McCain worked for several years to settle the controversy over P.O.W.-M.I.A.'s and to normalize relations with Vietnam -- an achievement that Kerry's Senate colleagues consider his finest moment. "He should talk about it more," Bob Kerrey said. "He transformed the region." In the same way, John Kerry sees himself as a kind of ambassador-president, shuttling to world capitals and reintegrating America, by force of personality, into the world community.

He would begin, if sworn into office, by going immediately to the United Nations to deliver a speech recasting American foreign policy. Whereas Bush has branded North Korea "evil" and refuses to negotiate head on with its authoritarian regime, Kerry would open bilateral talks over its burgeoning nuclear program. Similarly, he has said he would rally other nations behind sanctions against Iran if that country refuses to abandon its nuclear ambitions. Kerry envisions appointing a top-level envoy to restart the Middle East peace process, and he's intent on getting India and Pakistan to adopt key provisions of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. (One place where Kerry vows to take a harder line than Bush is Pakistan, where Bush has embraced the military ruler Pervez Musharraf, and where Kerry sees a haven for chaos in the vast and lawless region on the border with Afghanistan.) In all of this, Kerry intends to use as leverage America's considerable capacity for economic aid; a Kerry adviser told me, only slightly in jest, that Kerry's most tempting fantasy is to attend the G-8 summit.

Kerry's view, that the 21st century will be defined by the organized world's struggle against agents of chaos and lawlessness, might be the beginning of a compelling vision. The idea that America and its allies, sharing resources and using the latest technologies, could track the movements of terrorists, seize their bank accounts and carry out targeted military strikes to eliminate them, seems more optimistic and more practical than the notion that the conventional armies of the United States will inevitably have to punish or even invade every Islamic country that might abet radicalism.

And yet, you can understand why Kerry has been so tentative in advancing this idea. It's comforting to think that Al Qaeda might be as easily marginalized as a bunch of drug-running thugs, that an "effective" assault on its bank accounts might cripple its twisted campaign against Americans. But Americans are frightened -- an emotion that has benefited Bush, and one that he has done little to dissuade -- and many of them perceive a far more existential threat to their lives than the one Kerry describes. In this climate, Kerry's rather dry recitations about

money-laundering laws and intelligence-sharing agreements can sound oddly discordant. We are living at a time that feels historically consequential, where people seem to expect -- and perhaps deserve -- a theory of the world that matches the scope of their insecurity.

Theoretically, Kerry could still find a way to wrap his ideas into some bold and cohesive construct for the next half-century -- a Kerry Doctrine, perhaps, or a campaign against chaos, rather than a war on terror -- that people will understand and relate to. But he has always been a man who prides himself on appreciating the subtleties of public policy, and everything in his experience has conditioned him to avoid unsubtle constructs and grand designs. His aversion to Big Think has resulted in one of the campaign's oddities: it is Bush, the man vilified by liberals as intellectually vapid, who has emerged as the de facto visionary in the campaign, trying to impose some long-term thematic order on a dangerous and disorderly world, while Kerry carves the globe into a series of discrete problems with specific solutions.

When Kerry first told me that Sept. 11 had not changed him, I was surprised. I assumed everyone in America -- and certainly in Washington -- had been changed by that day. I assumed he was being overly cautious, afraid of providing his opponents with yet another cheap opportunity to call him a flip-flopper. What I came to understand was that, in fact, the attacks really had not changed the way Kerry viewed or talked about terrorism -- which is exactly why he has come across, to some voters, as less of a leader than he could be. He may well have understood the threat from Al Qaeda long before the rest of us. And he may well be right, despite the ridicule from Cheney and others, when he says that a multinational, law-enforcement-like approach can be more effective in fighting terrorists. But his less lofty vision might have seemed more satisfying -- and would have been easier to talk about in a political campaign -- in a world where the twin towers still stood.

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Kerry's Undeclared War By MATT BAI. Published: October 10, 2004. As New York and Washington were under attack on Sept. 11, 2001, a film crew happened to come upon John Kerry leaving the Capitol. The brief moment of footage, included in a BBC documentary called "Clear the Skies," tells us something, perhaps, about Kerry in a crisis. The camera captures Congressional... An undeclared war is military conflict between two or more nations without either side issuing a formal declaration of war. The term is sometimes used to include any disagreement or conflict fought about without an official declaration. Since the United Nations police action in Korea, a number of democratic governments have pursued disciplinary actions and limited warfare by characterizing them as something else such as a military action or armed response. Kerry's War. 22 likes. Detective and crime series following a young British lesbian in the LAPD! How would you cope with love, loss and a questionable...Â My name is Lozzy Hughes and this is my fan/store page for my current book series about a young lesbi See more. A Hong Kong Special Branch cop and a CIA agent reluctantly team up to bring down a major international terrorist. IMDb ID : tt0100595. Watch Undeclared War (1990) full movie with English subtitles.Â A Hong Kong Special Branch cop and a CIA agent reluctantly team up to bring down a major international terrorist. Hitler declared war because the US declared war on Japan, another Axis power. Roosevelt was actually intending to go to war with Germany, but he had no public support with him, so he kept staying put for the right moment for Hitler to do a clumsy mistake.Â So, technically, there was already an undeclared war being waged between Germany and the USA before the Germans formally declared war. Sooner or later, this undeclared war would have forced the US to declare war if Germany didnâ€™t do it first. 3. Related Questions.