

From National Review Online:

<http://www.nationalreview.com/mccarthy/mccarthy200405130837.asp>

May 13, 2004, 8:37 a.m.

The War that Dare Not Speak Its Name

The battle is against militant Islam, not "Terror"

By Andrew C. McCarthy

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is adapted from a speech given last month at the annual conference of the University of Virginia School of Medicine's [Critical Incident Analysis Group](http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/ciag/) (<<<http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/ciag/>>>) (CIAG). The theme of this year's CIAG conference was "Countering Suicide Terrorism: Risks, Responsibilities and Realities."

At any gathering of analysts, academics, and law-enforcement officers who specialize in counter-terrorism, it certainly is appropriate that we should focus on risks, responsibilities, and realities. My question, though, is whether we have the order backwards. Our most urgent imperative today is the need to confront reality. Only by doing that can we get a true understanding of the risks we face and our responsibilities in dealing with them.

What reality am I talking about?

Well, we are now well into the third year of what is called the "War on Terror." That is the language we all use, and it is ubiquitous. The tabloids and the more prestigious journals of news and opinion fill their pages with it. The 24-hour cable television stations are not content merely to repeat "War on Terror" as if it were a mantra; they actually use it as a floating logo in their dizzying set designs.

Most significant of all, the "War on Terror" is our government's top rhetorical catch-phrase. It is the way we define for the American people and the world - especially the Islamic world - what we are doing, and what we are about. It is the way we explain the nature of the menace that we are striving to defeat.

But is it accurate? Does it make sense? More importantly, does it serve our purposes? Does it make victory more identifiable, and hence more attainable? I humbly suggest that it fails on all these scores. This, furthermore, is no mere matter of rhetoric or semantics. It is all about substance, and it goes to the very core of our struggle.

Terrorism is not an enemy. It is a method. It is the most sinister, brutal, inhumane method of our age. But it is nonetheless just that: a method. You cannot, and you do not, make war on a method. War is made on an identified - and identifiable - enemy.

In the here and now, that enemy is militant Islam - a very particular practice and interpretation of a very particular set of religious, political and social principles.

Now that is a very disturbing, very discomfiting thing to say in 21st-century America. It is very judgmental. It sounds very insensitive. It is the very definition of politically incorrect. Saying it aloud will not get you invited to chat with Oprah. But it is a fact. And it is important both to say it and to understand it.

We have a rich and worthy tradition of religious tolerance in America. Indeed, in many ways our reverence for religious practice and tolerance is why there is an America. America was a deeply religious place long before it was ever a constitutional democracy. That tradition of tolerance causes us, admirably, to bend over backwards before we pass judgment on the religious beliefs and religious practices of others. It is an enormous part of what makes America great.

It led our government, within hours of the 9/11 attacks, to announce to the world that Islam was not and is not our enemy. Repeatedly, the president himself has said it: "The 19 suicide terrorists hijacked a great religion." The message from all our top officials has been abundantly clear: "That's that; Islam off the table; no need to go deeper."

But we have the ostrich routine way too far. A commitment in favor of toleration is not the same as a commitment against examination. We have been so paralyzed by the fear of being portrayed as an enemy of Islam - as an enemy of a creed practiced by perhaps a billion people worldwide - that we've lost our voice on a very salient question: *What will be the Islam of the 21st century?* Will it be the Islam of the militants, or the Islam of the moderates? That's the reality we need to grapple with.

Let's make no mistake about this: We have a crucial national-security interest in the outcome of that struggle. We need the moderates to win. And here, when I speak of moderates, I am not talking about those who merely pay lip service to moderation. I am not talking about those who take advantage of America's benign traditions and our reluctance to examine the religious practices of others. I am not talking about those who use that blind eye we turn as an opportunity to be apologists, enablers, and supporters of terrorists.

I am talking about authentic moderates: millions of Muslims who want an enlightened, tolerant, and engaged Islam for today's world. Those people need our help in the worst way. They are losing the battles for their communities. The militants may not be a majority, but they are a vocal, aggressive minority - and they are not nearly as much of a small fringe as we'd like to believe.

As an assistant U.S. attorney, time and time again I heard it over the last decade, from ordinary Muslims we reached out to for help - people we wanted to hire as Arabic translators, or who were potential witnesses, or who were simply in a position to provide helpful information. People who were as far from being terrorists as you could possibly be. "I'd like to help the government," they would say, "but I can't." And it was not so much about their safety - although there was, no doubt, some of that going on. It was about ostracism.

Repeatedly they'd tell us that the militant factions dominated their communities. These elements were usually not the most numerous, but they were the most vocal, the best networked, the best funded, and the most intimidating. Consequently, people whose patriotic instinct was to be helpful could not overcome the fear that they and their families could be blackballed if it became known that they had helped the United States prosecute Muslim terrorists. The militants had the kind of suasion that could turn whole communities into captive audiences.

This is no small matter. Events of the last decade, throughout the world, are a powerful lesson that the more insular and dominated communities become, the more they are likely to breed the attitudes and pathologies that lead to terrorist plots and suicide bombings. It's true that suicide bombers seem to defy precise psychological profiling; they come from diverse economic and educational backgrounds - the only common thread seems to be devotion to militant Islam. But while we have not had success predicting *who* is likely to become a suicide bomber, it is far easier to get a read on *where* suicide bombers and other terrorists will come from. They come from communities where the militants dominate and those who don't accept their beliefs are cowed into submission.

SAVING OURSELVES, SAVING ISLAM

That militant Islam is our enemy is a fact. That it is the object of our war is a fact. That we need to empower real moderates is a fact. And we need to talk about these facts.

We are not helping the authentic moderates if we avoid having the conversation that so needs to be had if the militants hiding in the weeds we've created are going to be exposed and marginalized. If we fail to be critical, if we fail to provoke that discussion, it will continue to be militants who hold positions of influence and who control indoctrination in communities, madrassas, prisons, and other settings where the young, the vulnerable, and the alienated are searching for direction.

For ourselves too, and for the success of our struggle, we need to be clear that the enemy here is militant Islam. If we are to appreciate the risks to our way of life, and our responsibilities in dealing with them, we need to understand that we are fighting a religious, political and social belief system - not a method of attack, but a comprehensive ideology that calls for a comprehensive response.

In the 1990s, our response, far from being comprehensive, was one-dimensional. We used the criminal justice system. As an individual, I am very proud to have been associated with the good work done in that effort. Yet, if we are going to be honest with ourselves - if we are truly going to confront reality - as a nation, we'd have to call it largely a failure.

We have learned over the years that the militant population is large - maybe tens of thousands, maybe more. Certainly enough to staff an extensive international network and field numerous cells and small battalions that, in the aggregate, form a challenging military force. Nevertheless, in about a half dozen major prosecutions between 1993 and 2001, we managed to neutralize less than three-dozen terrorists - the 1993 World Trade Center bombers; those who plotted an even more ghastly "Day of Terror" that would have destroyed several New York City landmarks; the Manila Air conspirators who tried to blow U.S. airliners out of the sky over the Pacific; those who succeeded in obliterating our embassies in Kenya and Tanzania; and the would-be bombers of Los Angeles International Airport who were thwarted just before the Millennium celebration.

In these cases, we saw the criminal-justice response at its most aggressive, operating at a very high rate of success. Every single defendant who was charged and tried was convicted. As a practical matter, however, even with that rate of efficiency, we were able to neutralize only a tiny portion of the terrorist population.

Now, however, combining law enforcement with the more muscular use of military force - the way we have fought the battle since September 11 - we are far more effective. Terrorists are being rolled up in much greater numbers. They are being captured and killed. Instead of dozens being neutralized, the numbers are now in the hundreds and thousands.

But I respectfully suggest that this is still not enough, because it doesn't necessarily mean we are winning.

WAR OF IDEAS

When I was a prosecutor in the 1980s, it was the "War on Drugs" that was all the rage. We would do mega-cases, make mega-arrests, and seize mega-loads of cocaine and heroin. It made for terrific headlines. It looked great on television. But we weren't winning. Neighborhoods were still rife with narcotics traffickers and all their attendant depravity. And there was the tell-tale sign: The price of drugs kept going down instead of up. We *said* we were at war, but with all we were doing we were still failing to choke off the supply chain.

Now I see another version of the same syndrome, and if we don't talk about Islam we will remain blind to it - to our great detriment. To understand why, all we need to do is think for a moment about the cradle-to-grave philosophy of Hamas. Yes, what blares on the news are suicide bombings that slaughter scores of innocents. But look underneath them, at what Hamas is doing day-to-day. They don't just run paramilitary training for adult jihadists. They start from the moment of birth. From infancy, hatred is taught to children. They learn to hate before they ever have a clue about what all the hatred is over. At home, in mosques, in madrassas, in summer camps - dressed in battle fatigues and hoods, and armed with mock weapons - it is fed to them.

And Hamas is not nearly alone. A funding spigot has been wide open for years. We are better about trying to shut it down than we used to be, but we're not even close to efficient yet. And even if we were to shut it down tomorrow, there are hundreds of millions - maybe more - already in the pipeline. Dollars that are contributed and controlled by the worst Wahhabist and Salafist elements. Those dollars are funding hatred. Hatred and the demonization of human beings simply because of who they are.

Some suggest that our situation might benefit from making accommodations - policy concessions that might mollify the militants and miraculously change their attitude toward us. But let's think about a five-year-old Muslim boy who has already gotten a sizable dose of the venom that is found in the madrassas and the Arabic media.

I can assure you that that five-year-old kid does not hate American foreign policy in the Persian Gulf. He does not hate the intractable nature of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. What he hates is Jews. What he hates is Americans. It is in the water he drinks and the air he breathes. Sure, as he grows, he'll eventually be taught to hate American foreign policy and what he'll forever be told is the "Israeli occupation." But those abstractions are not the source of the child's hatred, and changing them won't make the hatred go away - the hatred that fuels the killing.

When I say I worry that we could lose this struggle against militant Islam that we keep calling the "War on Terror," it is that fuel and that hatred I am talking about. We have the world's most powerful, competent military - it can capture and kill large numbers of terrorists. With the help of our law-enforcement and intelligence agencies - especially cutting off funding and cracking down on other kinds of material support - our unified government can make a sizable dent in the problem. It can give us periods like the last two years when there have been no successful attacks on our homeland - although it is hard to take too much comfort in that once you look at Bali, or Casablanca, or Istanbul, or Baghdad, or Madrid.

Yes, we can have temporary, uneasy respites from the struggle. We cannot win, however, until we can honestly say we are turning the tide of the numbers. The madrassas are like conveyor belts. If they are churning out more militants in waiting than we are capturing, killing, prosecuting, or otherwise neutralizing, then we are losing this war.

It's not enough to deplete the militants' assets. We need to defeat their ideas, and that means marginalizing their leaders. That means talking about how Islam assimilates to American ideals and traditions. It means making people take clear positions: making them stand up and be counted - and be accountable - not letting them hide under murky labels like "moderate".

As far as recognizing what we're really up against here, the terrorism prosecutions of the 1990s were a powerful eye-opener. We saw up close who the enemy was and why it was so crucial to be clear about it. Those cases are generally thought to have begun with the 1993 World Trade Center bombing - a horror that oddly seems mild compared to the carnage we've witnessed in

over a decade since. Yet, while that attack - the militants' declaration of war - began the string of terrorism cases, it was not really the start of the story.

That actually began years earlier. The men who carried out the World Trade Center bombing spent years training for it, mostly in rural outposts remote from Manhattan - like Calverton, Long Island, western Pennsylvania, and northern Connecticut. There, they drilled in shooting, hand-to-hand combat, and improvised explosive devices. From about 1988 on, they were operating here, and saw themselves as a committed jihad army in the making.

They were fully convinced that their religion compelled them to brutality. And unlike us, they had no queasiness: They were absolutely clear about who their enemy was. They did not talk in jingos about the "War on Freedom," or the "War on Liberty." They talked about the War on America, the War on Israel, and the War on West. They were plainspoken about whom they sought to defeat and why.

Their leader was a blind Egyptian cleric named Omar Abdel Rahman, the emir of an international terrorist organization called the "Islamic Group." This was a precursor of al Qaeda, responsible for the infamous 1981 murder of Anwar Sadat for the great crime of making peace with Israel. Abdel Rahman continues to this day to have a profound influence on Osama bin Laden; his sons have been linked to al Qaeda, and one of bin Laden's demands continues to be that America free the "Blind Sheikh," who is now serving a life sentence.

Abdel Rahman laid out the principles of his terror group - including its American division - with alarming clarity: Authority to rule did not come from the people who are governed; it came only from Allah - a God who, in Abdel Rahman's depiction, was not a God of mercy and forgiveness, but a God of wrath and vengeance, and a God single-mindedly consumed with the events of this world. For the Blind Sheikh and his cohorts, there would be no toleration for other religions or other views. There was militant Islam, and there was everybody else.

All the world was divided into two spheres - and it is very interesting how those spheres were referred to: the first was *Dar al Islam*, or the domain of the Muslims; the second was *Dar al Harb*. You might assume that *Dar al Harb* would be the domain of the non-Muslims. It is not. It is instead the domain of *war*. The militants perceive themselves as in a constant state of war with those who do not accept their worldview.

Sometimes that war is hot and active. Sometimes it is in recess while the militants take what they can get in negotiations and catch their breath for the next rounds of violence. But don't be fooled: the war never ends - unless and until all the world accepts their construction of Islam.

As Abdel Rahman taught his adherents - and as the bin Ladens, the Zawahiris, and the Zarqawis echo today - the manner of prosecuting the never-ending war is jihad. This word is often translated as *holy war*; it more closely means *struggle*.

We hear a lot today from the mainstream media about jihad. Usually, it's a happy-face jihad, congenially rendered as "the internal struggle to become a better person," or "the struggle of communities to drive out drug peddlers," or "the struggle against disease, poverty and ignorance." In many ways, these reflect admirable efforts to reconstruct a very troubling concept, with an eye toward an Islam that blends into the modern world.

But let's be clear: these are *reconstructions*. Jihad, in its seventh-century origins, is a forcible, military concept. I realize politesse frowns on saying such things out loud, but one of the main reasons it is so difficult to discredit the militants - to say convincingly that they have hijacked a peaceable religion - is this: when they talk about this central tenet, jihad, as a duty to take up arms, they have history and tradition on their side. As Abdel-Rahman, the influential scholar with a doctorate from the famed al-Azhar University in Egypt, instructed his followers: "There is no such thing as commerce, industry, and science in jihad.... If Allah says: 'Do jihad,' it means jihad with the sword, with the cannon, with the grenades, and with the missile. This is jihad. Jihad against God's enemies for God's cause and his word."

So rich is the military pedigree of this term, jihad, that many of the apologists concede it but try a different tack to explain it away: "Sure, jihad means using force," they say, "but only in defense - only when Muslims are under attack." Of course, who is to say what is defensive? Who is to say when Muslims are under attack? For the militants, Islam is under attack whenever anyone has the temerity to say: "Islam - especially their brand of Islam - is not for me." For the militants who will be satisfied with nothing less than the destruction of Israel, Islam is under attack simply because Israelis are living and breathing and going about their lives.

Simply stated, for Abdel Rahman, bin Laden, and those who follow them, jihad means killing the enemies of the militants - which is pretty much anyone who is not a militant. When your forces are outnumbered, and your resources are scarce, it means practicing terrorism.

Abdel Rahman was brazen about it. As he said many times:

Why do we fear the word *terrorist*? If the terrorist is the person who defends his right, so we are terrorists. And if the terrorist is the one who struggles for the sake of God, then we are terrorists. We have been ordered to terrorism because we must prepare what power we can to terrorize the enemy of God. The Quran says the word "to strike terror." Therefore, we don't fear to be called terrorists. They may say, "He is a terrorist. He uses violence. He uses force." Let them say that. We are ordered to prepare whatever we can of power to terrorize the enemies of Islam.

It is frightening. But, as this makes clear, it is not simply the militants' *method* that we are at war with. We are at war with their *ideology*. Militant Islam has universalist designs. That sounds crazy to us - we're from a diverse, tolerant, live-and-let-live culture. It's hard for us to wrap our brains around a hegemonic worldview in the 21st Century. But if we are going to appreciate the risk - the threat - we face, the reality is: it matters much less what we think about the militants than what they think about themselves.

The militants see terrorism as a perfectly acceptable way to go about achieving their aims. When they succeed in destroying great, towering symbols of economic and military might; when with a few cheap bombs detonated on trains they can change the course of a national election; it reinforces their convictions that their designs are neither grandiose nor unattainable. It tells them that their method of choice works, no matter what we may think of it.

Making our task even more difficult is the structure of Islam. As Bernard Lewis and other notable scholars have observed, there are no synods, and there is no rigorous hierarchy. There is no central power structure to say with authority that this or that practice is heresy. There is no pope available to say, "Sheik Omar, blowing up civilians is out of bounds. It is condemned."

So how does the conduct become condemned? How do we turn the tide? Naturally, only Muslims themselves can cure Islam. Only they can ultimately chart their course; only they can clarify and reform where reform is so badly needed.

There is much, however, that we can do to help. It starts with ending the free ride for the apologists and enablers of terrorists. We need to be more precise in our language. We are not at

war with terror. We are at war with militant Islam. Militant Islam is our enemy. It seeks to destroy us; we cannot co-exist with it. We need to defeat it utterly.

We seek to embrace moderate Muslims; to promote them, and to help them win the struggle for what kind of religious, cultural and social force Islam will be in the modern world. "Moderate," however, cannot just be a fudge. It needs to be a real concept with a defined meaning.

What should that meaning be? Who are we trying to weed out? Well, last year, the distinguished Middle East scholar Daniel Pipes proposed a few questions - a litmus test of sorts. Useful questions, he said, might include: Do you condone or condemn those who give up their lives to kill enemy civilians? Will you condemn the likes of al Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah by name as terrorist groups? Is jihad, meaning a form of warfare, acceptable in today's world? Do you accept the validity of other religions? Should non-Muslims enjoy completely equal civil rights with Muslims? Do you accept the legitimacy of scholarly inquiry into the origins of Islam? Who was responsible for the 9/11 attacks? Do you accept that institutions that fund terrorism should be shut down?

To be sure, we should have no illusions about all this. We are never going to win every heart and mind. Asking these questions and questions like them, though, would provoke a very necessary conversation. It could begin to reveal who are the real moderates, and who are the pretenders. It could begin to identify who are the friends of enlightenment and tolerance, and who are the allies of brutality and inhumanity. It could begin the long road toward empowering our friends and marginalizing our enemies. Finally, it could make the War on Militant Islam a war we can win - for ourselves and for the millions of Muslims who need our help.

- Andrew C. McCarthy, a former chief assistant U.S. attorney who led the 1995 terrorism prosecution against Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman and eleven others, is an NRO contributor.