
How Will We Know When the War Is Over?

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Since September 11, we have taken many measures to fight and win a war. The president of the United States said we were at war and the Congress agreed, authorizing military action and providing the funds. We federalized airport security, created the Office of Homeland Security, activated much of the National Guard to help with security duties, dropped many tons of explosives in Afghanistan, built up the facility at Guantanamo Naval Base to house prisoners, and on and on.

All of these things are probably necessary to win the war on terrorism and restore some peace and security to America and to the world. But how do we know when we have done enough? Recently, Center of the American Experiment asked several writers to

answer the question "How do we scale back government, without weakening our national security, after we have won the war?" An interesting question, with many interesting answers, but the question assumed victory was accomplished and that we all **knew** that it was accomplished. How are we to know?

The president has declared that we would rid the world of the scourge of terrorism, specifically terrorism with a global reach. He said we would treat all those who harbor and support terrorists as though they were terrorists themselves and, accordingly, we took military action by attacking the Taliban forces in Afghanistan. We have identified some particular terrorist organizations, especially Al-Qaida, as the principal culprits. Osama bin Laden is

a hunted man. We crushed the Taliban. There is a new, interim government in place in Afghanistan. Is the war over? Of course not. We have soldiers engaged in the Philippines against the Abu Sayef. We are gathering intelligence on terrorists who might be seeking refuge in Somalia. There is much talk of returning to Iraq to “finish the job.” If we are victorious in these efforts, will the war be over? Who knows? Probably not.

How then are we to know when we have won the war?

I think the answer to that question lies in the answer to another question: “**Why** are we fighting the war?” The answer to this question, surely, is not to seek revenge or even justice. The answer is to rid the world of the scourge of international terrorism. It is to have relative peace and security for ourselves and the rest of the world. So how do we know when this is accomplished?

There is, I am afraid, no simple answer to the question. There is no single entity that can surrender unconditionally (or even conditionally). There is not even someone who can agree to a “cease-fire” or an armistice. We need something by which we can measure our effectiveness, because the United States government will have to decide on its own when we have done enough, when the war is over. Without something to use as a measuring stick we are likely to fall back on public fatigue or public apathy or, at the other end, anti-war demonstrations, to tell the government when to stop. But neither apathy nor protests will protect us from further

terrorist attacks. We are fighting this war to make us and the world safer. It would be useful to know when we have accomplished our task.

I believe that the basis for measuring our success in the war to rid the world of international terrorism can be found in how we assess the actions of nation-states. The U.S. State Department has, for years, designated some countries as state sponsors of international terrorism. The most recent list contains seven governments—Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan, and Syria. This list is woefully inadequate to tell us how we are doing.

But a list *like* this could prove to be the answer we are seeking. The criteria for the list would have to be different from those now used. For example, it should include countries that “harbor” terrorists as well as those that “sponsor” terrorists. Clearly, the Taliban government in Afghanistan would have been added if the criteria were adjusted for our purposes. Perhaps there are other countries that intelligence sources have confirmed are sponsoring or harboring international terrorists. There are countries, such as Somalia, that have no recognizable government. We have to decide how to categorize these places. We might put a country on the list until it has a government we can hold accountable. But once the criteria for inclusion on this list have been devised, and the list compiled, we will have one basis for measuring our effectiveness in this war. We will have one way of deciding when the war is over.

If the new list of states contains all those who are harboring terrorists, and

only those who harbor terrorists, we should know where to concentrate our forces (military, diplomatic, financial, and all the rest) and be able to use the deletions (and additions) to that list as a basis for determining our progress in the war. When the day comes that there are no countries sponsoring (or **harboring**) international terrorists, when we no longer have any countries on our list, it seems to me that we will have won, or at least reached a stage that is the equivalent of an armistice. Under those conditions, there will be no place on earth where Al-Qaida or Hamas, or Hezbollah, or Abu Sayef, or Islamic Jihad in Palestine, or any of the other terrorist organizations can rest and recover, much less recruit, train, or equip terrorists. Conversely, as long as there is a single country on the list, a single refuge for terrorists, the war is not over.

When **every** country actively pursues any terrorist organization within its borders, and assists other countries to pursue terrorists, we will have a much safer world. There will still be terrorist acts around the globe, because an unhappy individual or a small group of individuals can “spring up” almost anywhere, even in the United States (Oklahoma comes to mind). But if, when an act of terrorism is committed, the host country **actively** pursues, prosecutes, and punishes the perpetrators rather than providing excuses and a refuge for them, we will have won this war. We will not have stopped crime, or even brutal murders, here in the United States or anywhere else in the world, but the **war** will be over. ■