



WEST POINT CTC SUMMARIES

STEVE COLL

CRUSH THE CELL

How to Defeat Terrorism Without Terrorizing Ourselves

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INTRODUCTION: TERRORISM UNPLUGGED

Michael Sheehan has had a 30 year career of public service; much of it involved in counterterrorism, unconventional warfare, peacekeeping and other security challenges. He has served with distinction as a U.S. Army Special Forces officer, a White House aide for two Administrations, as a senior diplomat at the State Department and the United Nations and finally as the head of counterterrorism for NYPD.

Sheehan is a 1977 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point. He served in a variety of Infantry and Special Forces assignments including as the Commander of a hostage rescue unit in Panama, as a counterinsurgency advisor in El Salvador and a Mechanized Company Commander on the Demilitarized Zone in Korea. He is qualified as an Airborne, Ranger, Special Forces, Jungle Warfare and Colombian Special Forces (Lancero) soldier. Sheehan also served in the field on peacekeeping missions in Somalia (1993-4) and Haiti (1995) while on active duty; in both cases as Special Advisor to the head of the UN Mission. While on active duty in the Army, Sheehan served at the White House on the National Security Council staff for both President George H.W. Bush (1989-1992) and President William Jefferson Clinton (1995-1997) in the areas of counter narcotics, peacekeeping and low intensity conflict. He was awarded the Combat Infantry Badge and numerous other decorations for his military service.

After retiring from the Army, Sheehan served at the State Department in the Bureau of International Organizations and worked on UN reform and peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia. After the bombings of our embassies in East Africa, Sheehan was appointed as

Ambassador Sheehan opens his book by stating that his goal is to put the present terrorist threat in the most realistic light possible, drawing on more than 20 years of counterterrorism work ranging from special operations to diplomacy. Part 1 of this book aims to properly define the real and current threats posed by al-Qa'ida, lone wolves, Hizballah and Iran. Part 2 attempts to draw out implications for counterterrorism (CT) policy based on the author's experience with the U.S. Army Special Forces, the State Department, the

White House, the United Nations and the New York Police Department (NYPD).

Al-Qa'ida actively seeks to attack the United States and American interests around the world, but the U.S. cannot strive to protect all people and places at all times. Rather than adopting a "bunker mentality" the immediate goal of U.S. CT policy should be offensive in nature—to detect and dismantle terrorist cells before they can attack.

PART 1 — THE TERRORIST THREAT: REALITY VERSUS HYPE

CHAPTER ONE: AL-QA'IDA: KILLERS AND BUNGLERS

Amb. Sheehan states that al-Qa'ida succeeded on 9/11 for two reasons: first, the United States was unprepared for the threat they posed, and second, the operation went remarkably well that day for an unusually disciplined al-Qa'ida cell. The resulting devastation likely exceeded even its planners' wildest dreams. However, the success of the 9/11 attacks led U.S. policymakers to exaggerate the threat and devise overly cautious CT policies. After the rude awakening of 9/11, politicians and press depicted it like the first ever terrorist attack on American soil and portrayed al-Qa'ida as a new force to be reckoned with, ignoring lessons from the previous decade of al-Qa'ida terror campaign. Amb. Sheehan recalls al-Qa'ida-connected attacks around the world prior to 9/11 to show that, while dedicated and lethal, terrorists in general have not been especially cunning and are prone to making mistakes. Seeing al-Qa'ida from both angles—as killers as well as bunglers—is important because understanding their strengths and weaknesses is the key to defeating them.

The East African embassy attacks in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and Nairobi, Kenya are a prime example of the strengths and weaknesses of al-Qa'ida. The operation was successful in that al-Qa'ida conducted near simultaneous attacks in two different countries, killing 224 people and injuring thousands more. However, the embassy attackers displayed poor tradecraft during the operation and were unable to get inside the embassy compounds or underneath the parking garages which

would have produced a far more lethal attack. Following the bombings, one of the attackers—Mohammed Sadiq Odeh (aka Abdull Bast Awadh)—was arrested while attempting to enter Pakistan, and quickly confessed to his involvement in the plot. Odeh's arrest led to the identification of the entire cell

involved with the attacks as well as the arrest of many others. The USS *Cole* attack also exemplifies al-Qa'ida's capabilities and limits. The original plot was set to strike the USS *The Sullivans* in January 2000, but the boat-bomb the attackers created sank under its own weight. The plotters made up for this failure by successfully hitting the USS *Cole* 10 months later. However, the operative charged with videotaping the operation for propaganda purposes fell asleep and missed the moment. These bungling terrorist cells have succeeded despite poor tradecraft and operational security largely by attacking countries that were asleep to the threat. The Madrid and London plots are cases in point—both countries had strong CT programs, but they were focused on domestic threats (Basque

CT INSIGHTS

- Bungling terrorist cells have succeeded despite poor tradecraft and operational security largely by attacking countries that were unprepared for the threat.
- Al-Qa'ida's attacks in the Islamic world have often targeted locals, and often Muslims, a trend that will only harm al-Qa'ida's appeal over time.

continued on page 8

CRUSH THE CELL

CHAPTER ONE: AL-QA'IDA: KILLERS AND BUNGLERS (CONT.)

separatist or the Irish Republic Army) rather than the threat from radical Islamist terrorists. Outside the West, al-Qa'ida has shown a stronger ability to sustain terror attacks. However, in many of

these attacks the preponderance of victims were locals, and often Muslim, a trend that the author believes will only harm al-Qa'ida's appeal over time.

CHAPTER TWO: KNOW YOUR ENEMIES

Amb. Sheehan suggests that counterterrorism officials should know who the terrorists are by name, not as an abstraction created in some broad-stroke analysis of global Islamist trends. Only then can we decode and understand the threat posed by these groups,

and, correspondingly, know their limitations. In this chapter the author recounts the formation and evolution of al-Qa'ida, with a special focus on the role of individual personalities who initially formed and shaped al-Qa'ida and regional and peripheral leaders who manage local terror cells, train operatives and plot attacks. Though bin Laden and Zawahiri face serious operational limitations in the post-9/11 climate, they continue to play an essential role in motivating al-Qa'ida's adherents and sustaining the movement's ideology. Amb. Sheehan notes that although initially they were the strategic and operational planners of al-Qa'ida, they currently serve as the

who suggest that because bin Laden and Zawahiri are contained operationally they are thus irrelevant.

Nevertheless, tactical leaders on the ground—those who organize and mobilize an individual cell to attack—are indispensable to al-Qa'ida's success. Without an effective tactical leader such as Mohamed Atta, the 9/11 plot may just have been another al-Qa'ida scheme never to be implemented (of which there have been many over the years). One case that shows the importance of tactical leaders is the November 2003 al-Qa'ida attacks in Istanbul, Turkey. Two different terror cells struck with truck bombs in the same week—the first on November 15 against two synagogues in the old city and the second on November 20 against the British consulate and the HSBC bank. The leader of the cell, Habib Aktas, was dispatched to Turkey by al-Qa'ida to strike American or Israeli interests, preferably the U.S. military base at Incirlik. However, after determining that Incirlik and other American targets were well protected, Aktas adapted and attacked Jewish and then British targets. The operatives did not wait to try and find a clever way to penetrate the American air base, since waiting would have increased their exposure time and vulnerability to law enforcement penetration. A key lesson in this case is that good defenses do help protect targets, but if you do not crush the cell, the terrorists will find another target.

CT INSIGHTS

- **Good defenses protect targets, but if you don't crush the cell, terrorists will find another target.**
- **While regional and tactical leaders have played an increasingly prominent role since 9/11, Amb. Sheehan disagrees with analysts who suggest that al-Qa'ida's senior leadership is irrelevant.**

ideological center of a broad radical Islamic movement. While regional and tactical leaders have played an increasingly prominent role since 9/11, Amb. Sheehan disagrees with terrorism analysts

CHAPTER THREE: AL-QA'IDA'S IDEOLOGY: WHY THEY KILL

Amb. Sheehan argues that to better understand and eventually defeat al-Qa'ida, we must understand its core ideology. We need to avoid oversimplified, unsophisticated interpretations of this ideology—such as the idea that bin Laden “hates freedom”—and gain a real handle on what exactly al-Qa'ida embraces and promotes. Related to this point, we must not confuse religious extremism with terrorism. Radical Islam, which Amb. Sheehan characterizes as a strong revival of religious fundamentalism, is the product of a broader crisis within the Islamic world. Al-Qa'ida's terrorism is a violent offshoot of Sunni fundamentalism. While al-Qa'ida chooses violence, numerous other Islamic fundamentalist factions around the world pursue their goals nonviolently. Amb. Sheehan believes that al-Qa'ida's bloody tactics are self-limiting. While violence captures headlines, it simultaneously limits the broader Islamist movement.

Understanding the roots of al-Qa'ida's ideology requires a nuanced understanding of Islamic history. Amb. Sheehan focuses on radical Salafism, a broad movement based on a conservative reading of the Koran derived from the Arabic *al-salaf al-salih*, meaning “the venerable forefathers.” Salafists believe that during the time of the Prophet Muhammad and immediately after his death, Muslims enjoyed a strong, almost utopian society. This perfection was lost

in the eighth century, after the fourth successor of the Prophet Muhammad died. Salafists seek to return Islam to the purity of the golden age of the Prophet Muhammad and believe that doing so requires Muslims to follow a literal interpretation of the Koran. While these overarching ideas unite Salafist movements, not all Salafists are alike. Some strands of the movement conduct missionary work exclusively while others seek to achieve their goals through the ballot box. A third category is the violent Salafists, who share the fundamentalist ideology of the religious and political Salafists but also believe that militancy is a religious requirement. It is only this radical and violent fringe that concerns the author.

During the 1990s, bin Laden issued two *fatwas* that established the primary agenda of al-Qa'ida and transformed the network from a local jihadist group to a global terrorist network. Through these *fatwas*, bin Laden was able to meld several different religious, political and violent movements into one coherent ideology. Saudi Wahhabism—a subset of Salafism named after Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the cleric who reintroduced *sharia* to the Arabian peninsula in the nineteenth century—had been exported around the world, where it comingled with the ideology of the fundamentalist Afghan and Pakistani Pashtuns who would later form the Taliban. Many of the chief clerics for the al-Qa'ida net-

CHAPTER THREE: AL-QA'IDA'S IDEOLOGY: WHY THEY KILL (CONT.)

work were Egyptian, owing to the country's prestigious religious schools. Egyptian terrorist groups also provided al-Qa'ida with experienced operatives, which was key to the fledgling al-Qa'ida network. This mix of radical revivalist doctrines (with Saudi, Pakistani, Afghan and Egyptian flavors) and seasoned Egyptian fighters all combined to make the lethal brew being cooked up in the Afghan training camps.

Bin Laden issued his first *fatwa* in 1996; it was a long and rambling edict that did not receive significant attention in the West. This message provided the religious and ideological justification for jihad against the United States and strongly criticized the Saudi government's support of American military intervention in Kuwait. Bin Laden also invoked the story of the fourteenth-century cleric,

Ibn Taymiyya, to justify targeting the "West"—or the U.S.—and provided the religious justification for suicide bombings. The second *fatwa*, issued in February 1998, was more concise and marked the beginning of al-Qa'ida's terrorist campaign against the United States. Bin Laden cited three specific issues regarding the U.S. behavior in the Middle East: the continued U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia following the first Gulf War, which was depicted as American occupation of Islamic lands; U.S. sanctions against Iraq, intended to demoralize Muslims; and, finally bin Laden linked American actions in the Middle East with the Arab-Israeli conflict, an effort to broaden al-Qa'ida's appeal to all Muslims. In this *fatwa*, bin Laden argued that it is a religious duty of all Muslims to defend the faith by waging a defensive jihad against the United States.

CHAPTER FOUR: IRAN AND HIZBALLAH: BLOODY BUT RESTRAINED TERRORISTS

Amb. Sheehan suggests that while both Iran and Hizballah are openly hostile toward the United States, they are restrained and rational terrorists that will only push the envelope of acceptable international behavior so far. The April 1979 Iranian revolution was a critical point in the revival of Shia radicalism in the Middle East. The Shia represent about 10 to 15 percent of the Muslim world, though they dominate in Iran and have large populations in Iraq and Lebanon. While Sunni and Shia peacefully coexist in many parts of the Muslim world, sectarian violence between these two sects has frequently erupted in such places as Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan and Afghanistan. When the Shia theocracy gained power in Iran it was a boost to fundamentalist Muslims around the world, even some Sunnis who felt that the Shia were apostates. In the early 1980s, Iran became increasingly involved with the Shia communities in southern Lebanon. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 provided a watershed opportunity to the Iranian Shia—who are Persian—to court the Arab Shia in Lebanon and expand their power base. Thus, Iran became the primary patron of Hizballah, which emerged as the only significant resistance to the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon.

Iranian state sponsorship helped Hizballah become an especially lethal force, and the group is considered by many as the world's premier terrorist organization. In the chaos of Beirut in the early 1980s, Hizballah developed numerous deadly tactics—the most concerning of which was the modern concept of Islamic suicide terrorism. The most famous example of this was the October 23, 1983 suicide attack against the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, in which a large truck bomb killed 241 American servicemen. Two days after this attack, President Reagan ordered the invasion of Grenada to depose the Marxist regime there, which also drew attention away from Beirut while the Marines were quietly withdrawn. Hizballah was able to achieve its strategic goal of expelling U.S. military forces

by using a crude and inexpensive weapon—the suicide bomber. Hizballah was relatively quiet after the 1980s, but reemerged in the 1990s with terrorist attacks on targets outside of the group's traditional area of operations—including two attacks against Israeli targets in Argentina and the bombings of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia. These attacks demonstrated Hizballah's worldwide capabilities but occurred as the group was maturing into a political party in Lebanon and seeking to polish its image internationally. Amb. Sheehan believes that Hizballah pulled the reins on suicide bombers and ceased attacks overseas, realizing that they would otherwise suffer international condemnation.

Amb. Sheehan believes there are several important counterterrorism lessons to be learned from the evolution of Hizballah and its terrorist strategy: First, the organization has an extensive global reach, thanks to Iranian support and direction. Second, the state sponsorship of Iran gives Hizballah a certain advantage over an organization such as al-Qa'ida, which has no state links. However, this same advantage also places restraints on Hizballah. The organization realizes that there are limits to what they can get away with outside of Israel and the occupied territories. This is why Israel regards Hizballah and its sponsor, Iran, as a greater security threat than does the rest of the world. Amb. Sheehan says that both Iran and Hizballah are "rational and restrained terrorists" that understand how to push the envelope of acceptable international behavior.

CT INSIGHTS

- While both Iran and Hizballah are openly hostile toward the United States, they are restrained and rational organizations that will only push the envelope of acceptable international behavior so far.
- Iranian state sponsorship gives Hizballah a certain advantage over an organization such as al-Qa'ida. However, this same relationship also constrains Hizballah.

CHAPTER FIVE: LONE WOLVES, CULTS, AND RADICAL MOVEMENTS

Amb. Sheehan believes that by training our eyes not only on 9/11 but also on the many attacks that occurred before and since, we can derive important counterterrorism lessons and develop a more complete understanding of the threat. Contrary to popular belief,

the U.S. faced a variety of terrorist attacks on its own soil prior to 9/11, launched by a host of extremists ranging from right and left-wing groups, animal rights groups and ecoterrorists, religious cults and radical Islamists, to name a few. Over the past 20 years,

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CHAPTER FIVE: LONE WOLVES, CULTS, AND RADICAL MOVEMENTS (CONT.)

most terrorists that have attacked the United States have been lone wolves—that is, independent agents who are not part of a larger organization. Amb. Sheehan argues that we must remain vigilant against groups like al-Qa’ida that seek to do us harm but that we must not lose sight of domestic fringe groups or lone wolves that also pose a serious threat.

OF INSIGHTS

- Over the past 20 years, most terrorists that have attacked the United States have been lone wolves.
- Small cells can be effective and tough to detect. However, when attackers are not linked to a broader organization or strategy, their capture leads to a quick return to normalcy.

The most successful terrorist attack on U.S. soil prior to 9/11 was the Oklahoma City bombing, which was essentially a one-man operation carried out by Timothy McVeigh. The Oklahoma City bombing demonstrates how easy it is to build a large and effective truck bomb and how easily lone wolves and fringe groups can fly under the radar. Amb. Sheehan also explores the lesser known case study of the Rajneeshee cult, which conducted the first serious biological terrorist attack in the United States in 1984. Cult members poisoned several salad bars in Oregon with salmonella, and it was later determined that this was a practice run for the Rajneeshees’ larger plan to sway the outcome of a local election by poisoning the local water supply. This case emphasizes the point that violent cults need to be closely monitored. However, it also shows that, even for an organization with extensive resources and scientific expertise, developing viable chemical and biological weapons is difficult. Several other terrorist attacks on U.S. soil over the years demonstrate that small cells can be very effective and also very difficult to capture. The Beltway Snipers are perhaps the best example of this; it was the simplicity of the operation that made

it difficult to stop. However, while the Beltway snipers show the effectiveness of small cells, it also shows that when attackers are not linked to a broader organization or strategy, their capture leads to a quick return to normalcy. The wave of fear that resulted from the sniper attacks never spread beyond the Washington area, since they were never viewed as part of a wider plot.

Aside from looking at domestically-oriented terrorist groups and individuals, Amb. Sheehan also discusses pre-9/11 Islamic terrorism in the United States. New York City in particular faced several deadly attacks by Islamic militants prior to 9/11, in addition to others that were thwarted. Most important among these was the first World Trade Center attack conducted on February 16, 1993. The men who carried out this attack were, in fact, precursors to the formal al-Qa’ida organization that would later attack the WTC on 9/11. Ramzi Yousef, the chief plotter of the first WTC bombing, was the nephew of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of the 9/11 attack. The ambitious landmark bomb plot was a planned follow-up to the first WTC attack, in which the cell planned to attack several locations, including the United Nations, the Lincoln Tunnel and the Holland Tunnel. The leader of the landmark cell, Siddiq Ibrahim Siddiq Ali, was linked to the first WTC attackers and also inspired by Omar Abdel Rahman, the “Blind Sheik.” Fortunately, the FBI was able to reactivate an informant and disrupt the operation before it could be carried out—the cell had already started mixing fuel and fertilizer into a bomb when the FBI raided the group’s safe house. The 1990s also saw a few unrelated attacks by Palestinians in New York City. While these attacks were not the work of an organized group, they are evidence of budding Islamic militancy within New York City prior to the actual establishment of al-Qa’ida.

PART 2: INSIDE COUNTERTERRORISM: FROM GREEN BERET TO NYPD BLUE

In the second part of the book, Amb. Sheehan spells out counterterrorism lessons from his experience in a variety of counterterrorism roles, including as a U.S. Army Special Forces officer,

diplomat, police official, United Nations bureaucrat, writer, researcher and lecturer.

CHAPTER SIX: THE U.S. ARMY SPECIAL FORCES: SHOOTERS AND ADVISORS

U.S. Special Forces, which today are incorporated in the military’s Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), are the most capable soldiers in the world. However, Amb. Sheehan also says that they have been constrained from action for many years in their most important job—defeating terrorism—and still are today. He believes the problem is two-fold: first, the higher-level commanders are too risk averse, and second, the military functions separately from the intelligence collectors whose information is key to their operations’ success. Amb. Sheehan is not optimistic that these problems can easily be corrected, though he offers several recommendations to improve the situation based on his own experience.

Amb. Sheehan argues that the failed rescue mission in Iran and the “Black Hawk Down” incident in Mogadishu, Somalia contributed to the military’s apprehension about using Special Forces. Following the Iran incident, Special Forces would not be used in sensitive “out-of-area” combat operations for almost a decade. Their mis-

sion shifted from operational standby to training other nations to conduct special missions. While training and working with local forces is critical, the author believes that Special Forces need to be more than just “advisors”—they also need to be “shooters.” Following the unsuccessful mission in Mogadishu, an internal JSOC review concluded that its forces had insufficient airpower and not enough combat power to overwhelm the Somali militants. However, Amb. Sheehan argues that this takes the “special” out of Special Operations—attack helicopters or fixed-wing gunships looming nearby make small-scale snatch operations near impossible. An alternative lesson should have been that Special Operations require a small, agile team to capture or kill wanted individuals.

Amb. Sheehan states that, in his experience, friction has always existed between JSOC forces and CIA operatives. Through several different missions, the author has heard a familiar refrain: the shooters complain that the intelligence is poor, while the intel-

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CHAPTER SIX: THE U.S. ARMY SPECIAL FORCES SHOOTERS AND ADVISORS (CONT.)

ligence collectors complain that the shooters have an insatiable appetite for detail, requiring an unrealistic degree of certainty prior to operating. Amb. Sheehan argues that the best solution to this dilemma would be to establish accountability by assigning one organization—either JSOC or the CIA—with the Special Operations mission and giving it both the military and intelligence tools to get the job done. However, achieving one of these scenarios is fraught with political sensitivities. The author recommends supporting the Pentagon's efforts since 9/11 to rebuild human intelligence (HUMINT) capabilities within the military. Amb.

Sheehan believes that what JSOC really needs is well-placed non-official cover personnel (NOCs) who can maintain deep cover in remote parts of the world to support operations. NOCs and their networks would ideally be capable of supporting Special Operations by providing eyes and ears on the target, providing plausible cover for advance units that may need to infiltrate and arranging clandestine transportation, communication and safe houses. JSOC's HUMINT efforts would have to be closely coordinated with the CIA but remain in direct support and under the control of JSOC leadership.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DOOR KICKERS, DIPLOMATS, AND SWAMP DRAINERS

While “door kickers”—operators in the field—are indispensable for CT operations, diplomats also play an important role, especially when employed against state sponsors of terrorism. While the chief of the State Department's Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism (S/CT), Amb. Sheehan described his mission as “draining the swamp”—pushing the U.S. government and our allies to take tough measures to eliminate terrorist sanctuaries around the world. While at S/CT in 2000, Amb. Sheehan and Richard Clarke—then the terrorism czar at the National Security Council (NSC)—drafted a demarche to the Taliban in an effort to eliminate bin Laden's sanctuary in Afghanistan. The message was simple: the Taliban would be held completely accountable for any future acts of terrorism committed against the United States by al-Qa'ida. However, al-Qa'ida attacked the USS *Cole* on October 12, 2000—about 6 months after the demarche—and we did nothing in response. We did not follow through on our official policy until the 9/11 attacks.

While diplomatic strategies are not likely to work against an unconstrained terrorist organization like al-Qa'ida or a recalcitrant regime like the Taliban, there have been several other U.S. government successes in confronting state sponsors of terrorism. The 1980s and early 1990s were active years for the traditional state sponsors of terrorism—Iran, Syria, Libya, Sudan and North Korea.

But since then, with the exception of terrorism directed at Israel, these countries' governments have all dramatically reduced their support of terrorism. Libya, Sudan and North Korea gave up the instrument of international terrorism entirely, due in large part to diplomatic pressure. The case of Sudan provides an interesting lesson. While the author was at S/CT in 1999, the Sudanese leadership had made overtures to the U.S. government to come in from the cold and escape from sanctions. However, Congress's concerns with the killing fields in Darfur and the Sudanese government's inability to dispel terrorist groups from their country prevented the United States from reopening its embassy. Unfortunately, the lack of an embassy diminished American influence in Sudan and limited our understanding of events taking place in that country—in terms of both terrorism and human rights—and likely impacted how the Darfur crisis has unfolded. Currently, the U.S. government does not have embassies in either Iran or North Korea. Amb. Sheehan states that this is one of the principal reasons we are so operationally inept in these parts of the world.

CT INSIGHTS

- Diplomatic strategies are not likely to work against an unconstrained terrorist organization like al-Qa'ida or a recalcitrant regime like the Taliban.

CHAPTER EIGHT: FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS: SPYING ABROAD

September 11 showed failures across the entire Intelligence Community (IC), but the primary failure was one of focus—most of

the IC was still dedicated to Cold War-era missions. Much of the post-9/11 discussion about intelligence reform focused on the need to improve the sharing of information between agencies. Unfortunately, the classic Washington solution was to create another massive bureaucratic layer: the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) and the Office of the Director of National Intel-

ligence (ODNI). Amb. Sheehan estimates that intelligence budgets have doubled since 9/11, although he has not seen a corresponding increase in capabilities. In this chapter, the author provides a tour of every echelon of the foreign intelligence business, from ground-level operations to decision-making at the White House. Ironically, the

most effective intelligence activities—HUMINT operations—are relatively cheap compared to other intelligence programs.

Amb. Sheehan was introduced to the intelligence world while serving in the U.S. military in El Salvador during the mid-1980s. During this tour, he frequently received sophisticated intelligence packages from the American embassy with satellite imagery and communications intercepts. However, this information often came too late to act on or gave irrelevant information. The author later met a Special Forces sergeant who had build his own HUMINT network from the ground-up and funded it on a shoestring budget. This network consisted of undercover soldiers and paid civilian informants, and the intelligence gleaned from these informal channels was consistently better than the impressive-looking intelligence packages from the embassy. Amb. Sheehan believes that the IC needs more creativity like this in its foreign intelligence collection efforts, especially in the fight against terrorism. However, just as

CT INSIGHTS

- HUMINT programs are some of the most effective intelligence operations and are relatively cheap compared to other intelligence activities.

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CHAPTER EIGHT: FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS: SPYING ABROAD (CONT.)

military commanders are often too cautious in using Special Forces, intelligence officials are overly risk-adverse in deploying intelligence operatives. Too frequently the CIA focuses on traditional case work

based out of the embassy rather than deep cover operations. We should be bolder in deploying agents against al-Qa'ida, the author argues, since it does not even have a counterintelligence capability.

CHAPTER NINE: DOMESTIC INTELLIGENCE: THE SPY GAME AT HOME

Americans love spy movies and novels, but in reality we are uncomfortable with spying—especially at home. In this chapter, Amb. Sheehan draws heavily on his experience with NYPD's intelligence

CT INSIGHTS

- Even if information sharing mechanisms are perfect, they are meaningless without good collection.

programs and contrasts this with the FBI, a more traditional domestic intelligence agency. Following 9/11, NYPD police commissioner Raymond Kelly reestablished the NYPD Intelligence Division and expanded the Counter Terrorism Division. Incorporating the intelligence collection

efforts into law enforcement operations was a major step for a police agency. Kelly also made the bold move of tapping two non-cops—Amb. Sheehan and David Cohen, a 30-year veteran of the CIA and former head of the agency's clandestine service—to head up the Counter Terrorism and Intelligence Divisions, respectively. This enlarged CT focus came at the same time that NYPD was shrinking—in contrast to the federal counterterrorism bureaucracy, which was expanding at an enormous rate.

NYPD's new intelligence apparatus engaged in frequent turf wars with the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) in New York, although Amb. Sheehan argues that the two programs complemented each other. He viewed the FBI as more reactive, since many of their leads were passed down from federal government agencies such as the CIA and NSA. NYPD, on the contrary, took a grassroots approach to developing intelligence leads and therefore saw many angles that the FBI missed. Whereas the FBI has vast resources

and many of its agents have advanced degrees, NYPD's officers tended to be more street-smart and armed with tremendous local knowledge. One particular advantage that NYPD had over the FBI was ethnic diversity, which allowed the force to more accurately represent New York City's demographics. Amb. Sheehan cites the arrests of several men plotting to attack the Herald Square subway station in the summer of 2004 as a case in point. The effort largely succeeded because the NYPD inserted a 24-year-old undercover cop of Pakistani descent into the cell—something that a “blond, crew-cut FBI agent from Topeka, Kansas” could not do.

In Amb. Sheehan's time studying domestic intelligence efforts, he realized that the Washington community was obsessed with information sharing in their efforts to transform the intelligence apparatus after 9/11. However, the author was always more concerned with intelligence collection—even if the intelligence sharing mechanisms are perfect, they are meaningless without good collection. During his time at NYPD, Amb. Sheehan continuously sought to introduce intelligence-led policing concepts to the force. Among other initiatives, he cross-trained the intelligence and CT units, even bringing in former CIA employees to offer instruction on tradecraft for recruiting and handling “assets”, or human intelligence sources. One of the major challenges to counterterrorism work in a law enforcement agency is that often you are investigating people before they commit a crime—a concept that is often unfamiliar in the police world.

CHAPTER TEN: CBRN: REAL DANGER OR OVERHYPED THREAT?

Despite al-Qa'ida's sustained interest in chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) weapons, the group's weapon of choice continues to be improvised-explosives. Nevertheless, given the potential lethality of such weapons, we must continue to focus counterterrorism efforts on the CBRN threat, even if the likelihood of their use is currently low. Nuclear terrorism represents the most devastating threat, although as long as nuclear weapons remain solely in the hands of nations, their containment is primarily a nonproliferation issue. The use of chemical, biological and radiological weapons represents the more likely terrorism scenarios—although Amb. Sheehan considers these threats weapons of mass *disruption* as opposed to weapons of mass *destruction*.

Unlike the federal government's CT bureaucracy, NYPD had limited resources and its small CBRN team, out of necessity, focused only on the most likely threat scenarios. The good news, Amb. Sheehan reports, is that terrorist groups' attempts to use these weapons have been largely futile. The most important terrorist chemical attack in recent years was the March 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system by the radical cult Aum Shinrikyo. The cult—which had vast financial resources and scientific expertise—managed to

kill 12 people in the chemical attack. The anthrax attacks following 9/11 similarly shows that it is possible, but difficult, to conduct a biological attack on a mass scale.

Improvised explosives remain the weapon of choice for terrorists. And while they may not have the same stigma as a chemical, biological or radiological event, they still can be enormously damaging—physically and psychologically—especially if a series of attacks is sustained over time. Large truck bombs are typically made with nitrate-based fertilizers, which can be purchased in large quantities at farm supply stores. Smaller backpack bombs are normally made of peroxide-based explosives, which can be made of readily available household and industrial chemicals. Amb. Sheehan argues that it should be much more difficult for would-be terrorists to get bomb-making materials. In winter 2005, NYPD put together an undercover operation to test how hard it would be to build a truck bomb in New York similar to the bomb that Timothy McVeigh constructed. The results of the effort—dubbed Operation Kaboom—were frightening: in 10 weeks, 10 men with about \$10,000 were able to construct a 10,000-pound bomb. In separate operations, NYPD officers were able to order large quantities of

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CHAPTER TEN: CBRN: REAL DANGER OR OVERHYPED THREAT? (CONT.)

high-percentage hydrogen peroxide, the same materials used to construct the London train bombs. They were able to order these materials over the phone with the flimsiest of covers, and in some cases even had the supplies delivered to a street corner in Brooklyn rather than an actual address. These exercises led the NYPD into

the business of “local nonproliferation”—denying dangerous materials to would-be terrorists.

CT INSIGHTS

- **Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) remain the weapon of choice for terrorists.**

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY: SEARCHING FOR A MISSION

Amb. Sheehan believes that the chief problem with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is evident in its name—securing an entire nation is simply too ambitious a task for one organization. DHS’ primary focus, counterterrorism, puts it in perpetual conflict with the FBI. The FBI remains the lead agency for domestic counterterrorism investigations and maintains the infrastructure in its field offices and JTFs to process, store and share classified information at the state and local level. Rather than compete with the FBI for the CT mission, DHS should be streamlined and refocused on the one important mission where it has the lead jurisdiction and infrastructure: border security. The DHS legacy agencies—including the Coast Guard, TSA, the newly organized Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement

(ICE)—should be strengthened and formed into the “Department of Border and Transportation Security”. Amb. Sheehan argues that DHS component agencies should also dedicate much more time and resources to running sophisticated HUMINT operations at our nations’ borders, airports and seaports, although the author believes Americans’ weariness of domestic intelligence operations will prevent this from occurring. To date, most DHS-sponsored efforts have come in the form of expensive technologies to establish defensive security measures, such as installing radiological screening systems for containerized materials passing through the ports. While Amb. Sheehan supports these important efforts, he argues that offensive strategies aimed at finding and crushing terrorist cells must be implemented in conjunction with defensive measures.

CHAPTER TWELVE: DEFENDING THE BIG APPLE

At NYPD, the time it took to move from the creation of an idea to beginning its implementation—the “flash-to-bang” time—was lightning speed compared to what he was accustomed to in Washington. In June 2005, NYPD sought to create a program to reach out to the private sector, recognizing that their personnel would be the true first responders in a terrorist event. Forty-five days after the first brainstorming session to create this program—which became known as NYPD Shield—they had a new organization, a new website, a mailing sent out to hundreds of private sector security managers and a briefing in the auditorium to kick the

program off. Another example was the author’s proposal to conduct random bag searches at all subway stations following the London 7/7 train attacks. The concept was approved in one meeting, and the very next morning at approximately 60 subway stations around New York, NYPD was conducting random bag checks on about one of every five passengers. While this effort was met with some resistance—including from the ACLU—Amb. Sheehan continued to push similar initiatives, believing that purely defensive measures would never be enough.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: CRUSH THE CELL

Washington logic would have us believe that we solve problems by creating new agencies and spending billions of dollars on ambitious new initiatives. Amb. Sheehan disagrees. As evidenced by the good work done under tight budgets at NYPD, leadership, focus, creativity and prudent risk-taking are more effective tools in the fight against terrorism than a steady flow of taxpayers’ dollars into already massive bureaucracies. Despite tremendous budget increases, Amb. Sheehan argues that the most important work in protecting the United States since 9/11 has been achieved with the capacity that was already in place. The crowning achievement of the CIA was the takedown of the Taliban in Afghanistan, accomplished only months after 9/11 with the same people and organization that existed before. The chief difference, argues Amb. Sheehan, was that the CIA was finally unleashed in Afghanistan and around the world.

The author firmly believes that we must apply a rigorous and honest cost-benefit analysis of our national counterterrorism apparatus—particularly at the FBI and CIA. Then, like most businesses that have to balance a budget, these agencies should put more resources into high-value, high-payoff activities and eliminate

low-value, low-payoff activities. Amb. Sheehan argues that such a review of American CT programs would show that the most efficient strategies are offensive in nature—finding and crushing terrorist cells at home and abroad. Defensive measures have their place, but the author is not aware of any terrorist attacks that have been intercepted by detectors, screenings or patrols. Amb. Sheehan’s primary proposals to strengthen our counterterrorism efforts focus on two areas: revamping our intelligence collection operations and assigning clear responsibility and accountability within our national agencies.

Amb. Sheehan puts forward several offensive strategies to combat terrorism. First and foremost, he argues that we must “know our enemy”. A deep and thorough understanding of the adversary is critical for victory in any form of warfare. Unfortunately, most “terrorism-experts” continue to overhype the threat, ultimately contributing to a self-fulfilling prophecy of doom. Aside from understanding our adversary, the author argues that intelligence operations are the key to counterterrorism. Human informant networks and communications intercepts are the best ways to identify terrorist cells in the planning stages and thwart their attacks before they can

CRUSH THE CELL

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: CRUSH THE CELL (CONT.)

launch them. However, once we understand our enemy and can locate them, we must unleash our intelligence agencies to actively pursue and crush terrorist cells. These efforts must be rooted in the law and have the appropriate oversight mechanisms, but the Intelligence

Community must not be strangled by lawyers and overly cautious bureaucrats. The CIA must become more flexible in recruiting and managing informants to penetrate terrorist networks from every corner of the world. The Department of Homeland Security also needs to further develop HUMINT programs so that it can run counterterrorism investigations at our seaports, airports and borders. Amb. Sheehan

reiterates that these offensive strategies generally do not entail big spending, but he acknowledges that there is a tremendous reluctance to push forward with aggressive strategies due to civil liberties concerns at home and squeamishness with working with unsavory partners overseas.

While Amb. Sheehan focuses mostly on offensive measures to countering terrorism, he also advocates several defensive strategies that should be used in conjunction with an offensive approach. First and foremost is to gain better control of our borders, keeping terrorists and would-be terrorists from entering or exiting the country. While homegrown terrorist cells are a serious challenge, their effectiveness can be minimized if operatives are unable to receive training and indoctrination at overseas terrorist camps. Our maritime borders also need to be strengthened, and the author suggests that weekend pleasure boaters may have to give up some of their unregulated privileges so that the Coast Guard can track and identify all boats in U.S. waters. Amb. Sheehan also advocates that we should harden key critical infrastructure vulnerabilities most likely to be attacked—namely, transportation (planes, trains and buses) and special buildings (government facilities, embassies, financial institutions and high-profile foreign hotels). Partnering with the private sector will go a long way toward better securing these vulnerabilities. Another defensive measure the author recom-

mends is the safeguarding of dangerous materials, particularly those materials that can be used for bomb-making or a CBRN attack.

The author closes the book by arguing that we should remember that the primary target of a terrorist attack is our psyche, and that we should never allow terrorists to have an inordinate impact on our national consciousness. The United States *will* be attacked again, Amb. Sheehan argues. But when this happens, we must not terrorize ourselves. We should express outrage at the attack and sadness at the loss of life it may have caused, but then we must calmly resolve to crush the attackers without panic, hysteria or overreaction. This is a delicate balance to achieve, but a controlled reaction should not be confused with complacency. Amb. Sheehan says that we should take an example from Israel: they clean up the attack area quickly, mourn their dead appropriately and without excessive fanfare, care for the injured and get back to normal life. Furthermore, following an attack, politicians and journalists in Israel are relatively mute compared to the irresponsible “terror pundits” in the American media and talk radio.

Terrorism cannot be eliminated from the planet, as some politicians have called for. It is a tactic as old as warfare itself and will always be an instrument favored by the weak. Our goal should be to minimize the impact of terrorism on our lives and to eliminate organizations that can cause strategic damage to the United States and our allies. Amb. Sheehan believes that ultimately the al-Qa’ida threat will be defeated at its source: within the Islamic faith. The movement is self-defeating as a result of the moral bankruptcy of its violent methods, and although its ideology has some appeal to those who value Islamic revivalism, it will eventually be rejected by most Muslims. In the interim, we must deal with the immediate threat to our interests and crush those cells that seek our demise. It is time to put the terrorist threat in perspective, Amb. Sheehan argues. There is a small and determined group of killers out there, and they will likely be set on attacking us in the foreseeable future. But these terrorists are not everywhere and they are not all-powerful. They have serious limitations—personal, organizational and ideological—and they have proven their limits by their inability to attack again in the United States since 9/11. Until this movement subsides—which the author speculates could take several generations—we must find and crush terrorist cells at every opportunity, with focused and relentless determination.

Ambassador-at-Large for Counter Terrorism (1998-2000) and was confirmed by the U.S. Senate in 1999. At the State Department, he was responsible for coordinating the U.S. government’s international counterterrorism policy and was a principal member of the National Security Council’s counterterrorism security group. From 2001 to 2003, Sheehan went back to peacekeeping duty as the Assistant Secretary General of Mission Support in the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, where he was responsible for supporting 16 missions around the world and over 40 thousand military and police peacekeepers. During this period, his focus was primarily on various African conflicts.

In his last assignment, Sheehan was the Deputy Commissioner for Counter Terrorism at NYPD, where he helped re-shape NYPD into what is widely regarded as one of the most effective counterterrorism organizations in the world (2003-2006). His office had over 120 detectives assigned to the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force where they partnered with the FBI in managing the counterterrorism investigations in the New York metropolitan area. In addition, he commanded the NYPD Counter Terrorism Division which had responsibility for infrastructure protection, training, deployment of counterterrorism patrol assets, private sector outreach and other functions.

Sheehan has Masters Degrees from the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service (1986 to 1988) and the U.S. Army Command and Staff College (1991). In both programs his dissertations concerned irregular warfare theory and practice. Sheehan continues to speak and lecture on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency policy and is a distinguished fellow at the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point and the Center for Law and Security at NYU. In addition, he is a counterterrorism analyst for NBC News (in English and the Spanish language).

Currently, Sheehan is a partner in Torch Hill Equity partners, a private equity group that specializes in defense, intelligence and security sectors. He also maintains a select group of clients as a security consultant to the financial services industry and large infrastructure development projects in New York City and the Middle East.

OF INSIGHTS

- **Leadership, focus, creativity and prudent risk taking are more effective tools in the fight against terrorism than a steady flow of billions of dollars into already massive bureaucracies.**
- **Despite tremendous budget increases, the most important work in protecting the United States since 9/11 was achieved with the capacity that was already in place.**