



## Osama's Dream Team: Kerry-Edwards or Bush-Cheney?

By **JOHN W. DEAN**

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Recently, while speaking extemporaneously at a Des Moines campaign stop, Vice President Dick Cheney warned that if Senator John Kerry is elected President, the United States will be in danger of being attacked again by terrorists.

Implicitly, of course, Cheney is suggesting that only Bush-Cheney can keep us safe. That's foolish talk: No one knows what blood terrorists might shed tomorrow, and Cheney's taunting them only invites danger.

Nonetheless, Cheney has raised a vital issue. In his own snide way, he has posed a central question in this presidential campaign: Who would Osama bin Laden like to see in the White House?

No one should vote out of fear. But I do think it's worth considering each candidate's stance on terror.

### Cheney's Explanation Of The Purported Risk If Kerry Is Elected

According to *The Washington Post*, Cheney stated, "It's absolutely essential that eight weeks from today, on November 2nd, we make the right choice." Cheney continued, "if we make the wrong choice then the danger is that we'll get hit [by terrorists] again."

Cheney predicted "that we'll be hit in a way that will be devastating from the standpoint of the United States, and 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 are not really at war."

Certainly, Cheney - in these off-the-cuff remarks -- didn't mean to say that a new, "devastating" attack would convince Kerry - or anyone else - that we are "not really at war." That claim would be absurd.

Rather, he appears to be suggesting that if Kerry were elected President, he would adopt the "pre 9/11 mind-set" and treat "terrorist attacks" as "criminal acts" rather than acts of war. For Cheney, such a mind-set would create a vulnerability that could allow - or even invite - an attack.

The record, however, does not support Cheney's characterization of Kerry's views.

### Kerry's Position On Fighting Terrorism: "We Are A Nation at War"

At the Democratic convention, Kerry told the delegates, and the national television audience, "We are a nation at war - a global war on terror against an enemy unlike any we have ever known before. . . . And we need to rebuild our alliances, so we can get the terrorists before they get us." On many occasions before and since, Kerry has taken the very same stance.

Because he believes we are at war, Kerry would also expand the military - beyond its current size under Bush-Cheney. He said, "I will build a stronger American military. We will add 40,000 active duty troops - not in Iraq, but to strengthen American forces that are now overstretched, overextended, and under pressure. We will double our special forces to conduct anti-terrorist operations."

Cheney's suggestion that Kerry believes we are not at war, and terrorism is merely a law enforcement problem, is simply wrong. In fact, Kerry has embraced the 9/11 Commission Report as the best way to deal with terror organizations, and he has called for adoption of all of its recommendations.

When all is said and done, there is little difference between Kerry-Edwards and Bush-Cheney in their commitment to fight terrorism. "Both basically want to stay the course ... in the war on terrorism," *The Boston Globe* observed two days before Cheney's assertion that Kerry's election would result in further terror attacks against the United States.

Cheney has chosen to focus on one statement made by Kerry, and after removing it from its context, declared it to be Kerry's position on fighting terror. In this statement, Kerry called for a "more effective, more thoughtful, more

strategic, more proactive, more sensitive war on terror that reaches out to other nations and brings them to our side."

Addressing this statement, Cheney responded, "America has been in too many wars for any of our wishes, but not a one of them was won by being sensitive." Cheney added, "A sensitive war will not destroy the evil men who killed 3,000 Americans and who seek the chemical, nuclear and biological weapons to kill hundreds of thousands more. The men who beheaded Daniel Pearl and Paul Johnson will not be impressed by our sensitivity."

Of course, Kerry was suggesting that America be sensitive to the views of other nations - instead of testing NATO and alienating longtime allies. He wasn't suggesting that we be sensitive to terrorists!

Indeed, as was quickly pointed out, Cheney himself - along with President Bush, Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld, and Attorney General John Ashcroft -- had all called for sensitivity in the war on terror.

Still Cheney has continued to distort the meaning of Kerry's call for sensitivity - untroubled by the hypocrisy that he, and his colleagues, had earlier made such statements.

### **Failure Of The Bush and Cheney War On Terror**

In truth, the differences between Bush-Cheney and Kerry-Edwards in fighting terror are not those that Cheney has cited. This is not to say that there are not real differences in these men and how their presidency might change the way terrorists respond to the results of the November election.

Bush and Cheney seek to make complex problems simple, and describe them as black and white, good versus evil. Kerry and Edwards (maybe because they are trained as lawyers) appreciate that the real world is varying shades of gray, nothing is simple, and the complex problem of terrorism will not be solved by tanks and troops, and pretending we can keep terrorists from America by fighting wars in the Middle East.

Experts on terrorism, as well as military analysis, have repeatedly pointed out this truth: "A strong military force, by itself, does not deter terrorism -- in point of fact, terrorism has developed as a response to strong governmental powers." Other nations might think twice when facing the force of overwhelming strength. But not sub- or trans-national terrorists, who don't fight on battlefields. Nor do casualties trouble the terrorist leaders whose religious beliefs postulate that death is a great reward.

Despite these truths, however, Bush and Cheney continue to think in these terms. If anyone ought to be accused of having a pre-9/11 mind-set, it is they. Their tactics might have worked well in the Civil War, but they are failing in the fight against modern terrorists groups.

Read between the lines of the 9/11 Commission Report. It is saying that the Administration's choice to focus on troops and tanks, at the expense of diplomacy and other measures, makes us vulnerable to terrorism - rather than protecting against it. These are the views of a bipartisan body that looked extensively at the facts and sought the wisdom of the most knowledgeable people in the nation.

Examine, if you will, the progress that has been made in apprehending terrorists thus far, for it has come largely because of the work of other nations. Despite all the effort Bush and Cheney have made to alienate them, others have come through to make crucial arrests abroad.

Bush and Cheney remain insensitive to what the "Arab street" thinks of them and this nation. They have only covered up the failures of their military command with its consequences at Abu Ghraib, which has embittered (at a minimum) a generation of Muslims against America.

Arab- and Muslim-Americans should have been a primary weapon in the war on terrorism. We need their knowledge and language skills. A program to recruit numerous patriotic Americans of Arab descent into the FBI will be essential to winning the battle with Islamic terrorists.

Yet this Administration's abusive tactics - including FBI interviews that have delved into religious practices, mass detentions that were clearly based on religion and national origin, and the like - have seriously damaged the Administration's image in Arab- and Muslim-American communities.

In short, for the past three years the Bush Administration has utterly ignored the approach that the 9/11 Commission recommended. It is not that this approach has not been conspicuous. The Commission stated the obvious when it said that "long-term success demands the use of all elements of national power: diplomacy, intelligence, covert action, law enforcement, economic policy, foreign aid, public diplomacy, and homeland security. If we favor one tool while neglecting others, we leave ourselves vulnerable and weaken our national effort."

### **Without Doubt Osama Would Like Bush and Cheney Reelected**

Can there be any doubt about who Osama would like to see in the White House? I think not. Let me explain.

In my book, *Worse Than Watergate: The Secret Presidency of George W. Bush*, I included a detailed examination of the Bush-Cheney record on terrorism from 9/11 to February 2004 (when the book went to press). I noted much tough talk, and over-reaction by Bush and Cheney. I also concluded that such tactics will only entice and encourage terrorists "[to up the ante toward a worse-case scenario](#)."

Today, that reality is only clearer, as I have continued to examine the goals of the terrorists. As prolific writer [Joseph Coates](#) explains, [terrorists have clear goals](#): they "seek to prove that governments cannot protect their people." By committing terrorist acts, they hope to provoke an extreme response, "the more extreme the better" - for such a response aids them in recruitment, and arouses hostility toward the responder.

In [his recent essay](#), law professor Oren Gross described a similar dynamic: he believes that by forcing excessive response, terrorists seek to destroy the fabric of democracy, discredit the government, alienate citizens, and undermine the moral basis of the government's actions.

What better way to convince other Islamic fundamentalists that the West shouldn't be in the Middle East, than for a Western country - in an extreme response only tenuously connected, if at all, to a terrorist attack - to wage a preemptive bloody war in the Middle East? Even better, that this war would be justified by the need to prevent the use of dangerous weapons that turn out not to exist.

Bush and Cheney have to be Osama's dream team for November. They have all but promised even more extreme responses in the future, which surely must please Osama.

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