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NOTE FOR THE PRESIDENT

There are three goals:

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FURTHER

- (1) to bring to justice those responsible;
- (2) to construct an agenda for action against international terrorism;
- (3) to co-opt the world's leading countries in support of action.

(1) The military response: Assume UBL or associated groups operating out of Afghanistan are responsible. It looks like this will emerge clearly in the next few days.

Assume, as a result of the latest operation, we can pinpoint UBL's whereabouts. We could strike against him. But: (a) pinpointing may, even with the latest operation, be impossible; (b) UBL is a symbol. Taking him out will not end the threat. There are scores of training camps in Afghanistan connected with Islamic extremism. The capability to attack will remain, ie we will have taken out the man but not the system.

The pressure will be on us, rightly, to take out the system. These camps are all over Afghanistan. The Taliban help, even run them.

One possibility would be: to present the evidence of UBL or associated group guilt. State the extent of the camps and thus the problem. Demand the Taliban either yield up UBL, his associates and close the camps verifiably, with proper monitoring; or face guilt by complicity.

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Supposing the Taliban don't do what they should or prevaricate; and we strike at them. In this eventuality, we would need:

- (a) to target as carefully as possible Taliban assets, realising they will use women and children without compunction;
- (b) have some method of pursuing UBL within Afghanistan;
- (c) build a strong alliance for such radical action in surrounding states: Pakistan, which needs our help financially; Iran, very difficult for the USA but they are deeply hostile to the Taliban; and Russia;
- (d) possibly give direct backing to the Northern Alliance.

Our task here would be to make action effective whilst not triggering a wave of Islamic support for Afghanistan round the world.

But the minimum is to take out UBL and his close associates; the maximum is to charge the Taliban with complicity and target them too.

An alternative to this "immediate response" would be to take strong diplomatic and political action and deal with this as per (2) below, not a military strike. But the scale of this atrocity makes that hard. Purely a long game, unless certain to succeed, will be tough to argue for.

(2) The political agenda against international terrorism: In any event, we need to construct an agenda that puts onto a new footing action against this new evil.

If this is a war – and in practical, if not legal terms, it is – we need war methods. Here are the aspects we need to consider:

- (a) who are these groups? Primarily Islamic terrorists but as with FARC, but not limited to them. There will be borderline cases of terrorists/civil war fighters etc but that should not deter us from trying to establish the scale of this problem; and identify these groups clearly;
- (b) we need to review urgently the laws that in a democratic society they abuse: extradition procedures; how the groups are financed; their money is laundered; their organisations operate; their people move about. This has implications for international agreements and domestic laws. But for years, the West has pussyfooted around with these issues. These groups don't play by liberal rules and we can't either;
- (c) there are states and governments that either harbour or turn a blind eye to these groups. What sanctions and/or action do we take in respect of them?
- (d) after reflection, there will be many who ask: what is the next stage of this evil? What of their capacity to get hold of biological, chemical and other WMD? We know that there are countries and individuals trading in WMD and/or trying to acquire them. We need a range of sanctions and pressures to stop this.

Some of this will require action that some will balk at. But we are better to act now and explain and justify our actions than let the day be put off until some further, perhaps even worse catastrophe occurs. And I believe this is a real possibility.

It would also help in the Islamic world if we could find a way to revive the Middle East Peace Process. One final, off-centre, thought on this issue. It is chilling how widespread is the support within the Islamic world for the theological basis of such terror. Inter-faith dialogue, internationally-led with the full participation of moderate Islam is very important. Suicide killers believe they are doing the will of God. Such beliefs must be countered.

(3) Co-opting the rest of the world: The US will do what it must to defend itself. But it is easier with full international support; the knock-on consequences of any action are more manageable with it; and we need the support to achieve some of the objectives.

It is now that the world is in a state of shock; now that it feels maximum sympathy for the US; now that it can be co-opted most easily. Locking in the international community sooner rather than later is therefore critical.

The NATO statement is excellent. UN Security Council backing would be excellent and allow the US and allies the clear legal base to act.

A G8 meeting in the US may seem unnecessary or even a distraction. But the case for it is this: all G8 leaders would feel obliged to be totally supportive; the Russians and others want it and if their wish is acceded to, will want to prove

their support; it allows the agenda in (2) to get off the ground, ie it kicks off a process that will lead to action; and it gives some diplomatic and political bustle at a moment when we really need time and space before any military strike.

The downside would be any possibility of discord; but that could be sorted and assessed before we go snap on it.

It goes without saying that Russia and China are crucial. We have got to say to the big nations of the world: look we have a common cause in favour of stability and against chaos. Now is the time to put aside other geo-political differences and unite against a common enemy.

My final point. We need the time to get this right. But we also need the heat of the moment to get maximum support for what is done. Point (1) has to be decided on evidential and military grounds and its timing varies accordingly. Points (2) and (3) should be done in any event ASAP.

TONY BLAIR

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