

March 6, 2002

THE NATURE OF OUR ENEMY

By BILL McCOLLUM

Even though a degree of normalcy has returned to air travel, long-term economic consequences for Florida linger.

Aside from those directly affected by the trauma of September 11, 2001, in New York and Washington, no state has suffered more from the terrorist attacks or appears more vulnerable to future acts of terrorism than Florida.

The economic cost of September 11 will be felt in Florida for months and possibly years to come. The travel and tourism industry is Florida's single largest revenue producer. When air transportation was dramatically interrupted after September 11 and many people became fearful of flying, convention bookings were canceled and families postponed or canceled vacation trips. In turn, tourist-related businesses laid off workers, cut back or canceled orders from vendors, and in some cases shut down. Even though a degree of normalcy has returned to air travel, long-term economic consequences for Florida linger.

The psychological impact alone of September 11 has had a negative impact on the nation's economy. Some economists believe it created a recession that would not otherwise have occurred. At any rate, economic activity is projected to remain sluggish for some time, which in turn means fewer people using discretionary income for travel, be that for tourism or business. Florida businesses dependent upon such activity have been forced to adjust, meaning even slower economic activity comparatively in Florida than elsewhere. For certain businesses this will mean bankruptcy. For others, it will simply mean postponing expansion plans or lower revenues for the bottom line.

In turn, state and local government revenues have declined, affecting many other things. Already under enormous pressure from population growth,

Florida's public education system will struggle with fewer resources. Many government-funded projects will be delayed or canceled. In Orlando, for example, plans to use a portion of tourism tax revenue to rehabilitate the downtown arena were scrapped, which in turn apparently triggered a decision by Orlando Magic basketball team owner Rich DeVos to put the team on the market—something that could result in a move to another city elsewhere in the country.

With its transient population, great racial and ethnic diversity, many seaports and a difficult coastline to patrol, and obvious potential terrorist targets such as Disney World and military installations, Florida is especially vulnerable to future terrorist acts. To combat this, Governor Jeb Bush has set up a regional domestic security team to coordinate and direct efforts to prevent acts of terrorism and to mitigate losses if they do occur. Law enforcement officers, firefighters, health officials, and many others have joined in this extraordinary effort at preparedness and defense. But they can only do so much. Business and community leaders across the state need to be engaged to help this cause and continually updated on the terrorist threat. In addition, the general population needs to be engaged and prepared for the long struggle ahead to win the war against terrorism.

The radical Islamist movement had been growing for decades before Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, and it will take decades to overcome it. It is in large part driven by those who desire to wrest power from existing governments in countries with large Muslim populations. But its strength flows from an intolerant religious fervor with anti-American and anti-Western resentments fanned

Those who have been our allies in the effort in Afghanistan will not necessarily be supportive of actions the United States might undertake elsewhere.

by years of poverty and illiteracy in the face of a growing and comparatively opulent wealth and standard of living in America and most of Europe we call the West.

Terrorism is the means by which these radicals intend to attain their goals. The attacks of September 11 were part of a grander scheme to undermine American public support for involvement in Muslim regions and to recruit more people to the radicals' cause. While it appears that it has had just the opposite effect for the moment, the radicals have a long-term view, are deeply committed, and are ensconced in many locations throughout the world. This is why President Bush has stated America will ferret out terrorist organizations and cells wherever they exist for however long it takes. And it is likely to take a very long time. It is also likely that there will be other acts of terrorism attempted in the United States and against American interests abroad in the coming years.

Osama bin Laden was one of many young Muslim from a variety of countries who migrated to Pakistan to train and fight the Soviets during their occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s. Many had come from radical Islamist backgrounds, and others who did not were often influenced by them so that after the Soviet withdrawal in early 1989, there was a much larger, better trained network of radicals than ever before. The common bond was a desire to see the governments of their native countries replaced by those sharing their views and a strong hostility to the United States and the West and the values they represented.

Because of his radical views, bin Laden was not welcomed in his native country and migrated to Sudan where he developed his al-Qaeda organization. When Sudan threw him out, he moved his operations to Afghanistan, and the rest is history.

But this does not tell the whole story. bin Laden's right arm in all of this is Dr. Ayman Zawahri, an Egyptian doctor who headed Egypt's Islamic Jihad, which merged into al-Qaeda a couple of years ago. This is one of many radical organizations in Muslim countries with a long history. Many believe this organization was responsible for the assassination of Egyptian Prime Minister Anwar Sadat. It is believed that Zawahri, bin Laden, and many other well-educated radicals took their

inspiration from an Egyptian named Sayyid Qutb who in 1964 wrote that unjust rulers could be considered infidels, thus giving rise to a new militancy in an already existing radical Muslim movement. Qutb in turn is believed to have been part of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood that dates back to 1928 when a schoolteacher named Hassan al-Banna founded it with the dream of resurrecting the golden age of Muslim Empire. He said, "It is the nature of Islam to dominate, not to be dominated, to impose its law on all nations and to extend its power to the entire planet." al-Banna established a secret para-military wing that carried out violent attacks against the British, the monarchy, and President Gamal Abdel Nasser.

Those who have spent a great deal of time interpreting the views of al-Banna, Qutb, and more recent followers say all the radical Islamist groups have the ultimate goal of setting up an Islamic state with no borders. While this may be the ideal, it is quite apparent that many believe in intermediate goals of bringing down the governments of Muslim populated states and replacing them with those in concert with their views. In widely differing degrees of size, influence and strength, radical Islamist organizations exist and have existed for many years in Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iran, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Cells of these organizations exist in many other countries. They had been networking for common purposes for some time, but bin Laden and the comparatively sophisticated organization he developed under the name al-Qaeda united them more than ever, provided common goals and direction, and inspired many more to become actively involved in radical causes. Supporters are often found in high political office, the military, and the intelligence operations of most of these countries. Sometimes they already have a significant amount of the power of a government (this is especially true of radical clerics in certain countries such as Iran and Sudan).

All of this puts the difficulty of President Bush's war on terrorism in perspective. Post-Afghanistan, it cannot help but be complicated and protracted. Those who have been our allies in the effort in Afghanistan will not necessarily be supportive of actions the United States might undertake elsewhere. The radical leaders are counting

on the will of Americans to crack rather than to endure a many years long, very difficult effort that may get quite lonely.

Many Americans have heard President Bush say that the effort to root out the terrorists is going to take a long time and that the destruction of bin Laden and his organization will not be the end of it. But hearing this and understanding its full implications are two different things. If the effort is to be sustained over the length of time required, it is absolutely essential that many more Americans than do at present understand the full scope and nature of the enemy we face. It is not enough to simply know that Florida and the nation are vulnerable to future potential attacks by those perfectly willing to sacrifice their lives for the greater radical Muslim cause. Business and community leaders in our state and in other states must become and remain well-versed in the nature of the terrorist organizations and followers, the history of the radical Islamist movement, and what needs to be done both at home and abroad to overcome this movement. For if the business and community leaders do not have the knowledge and confidence to assure others, over time the radicals will be proven correct in their assumption that Americans will become impatient and force their government to withdraw most of its presence and influence from the countries that are the focus of the radicals, and thus assure radical Islamists get their wish to govern these countries.

This piece is a step toward making sure the radicals do not succeed.

#

Bill McCollum is a former U.S. Congressman representing Central Florida and is now a partner with the Baker & Hostetler law firm in Orlando, Florida, and Washington DC. He served on the House Select Committee on Intelligence and founded and chaired the House Task Force on Terrorism. Presently McCollum serves on Governor Jeb Bush's Domestic Security Advisory Panel.