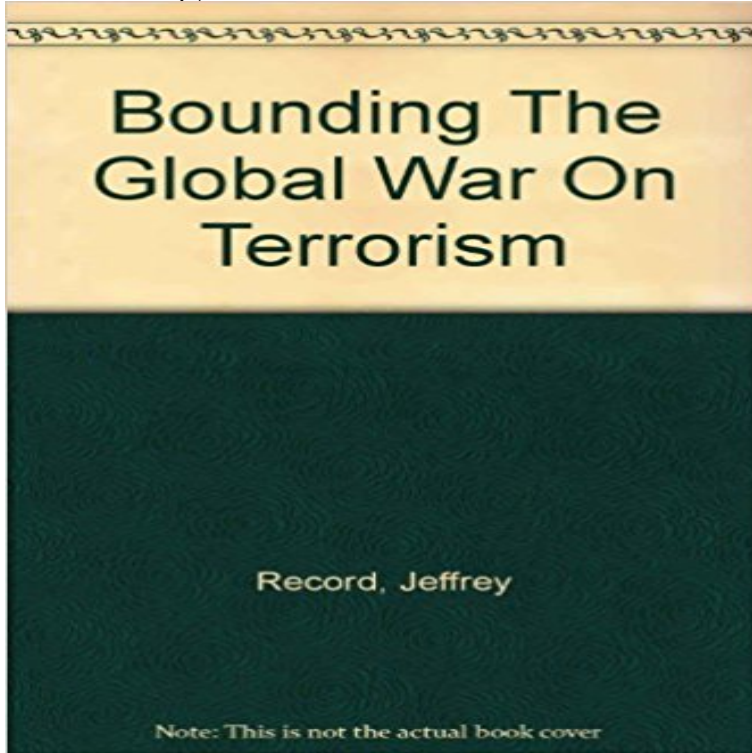


Bounding The Global War On Terrorism



In the wake of the September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the United States, the U.S. Government declared a global war on terrorism (GWOT). The nature and parameters of that war, however, remain frustratingly unclear. The administration has postulated a multiplicity of enemies, including rogue states; weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferators; terrorist organizations of global, regional, and national scope; and terrorism itself. It also seems to have conflated them into a monolithic threat, and in so doing has subordinated strategic clarity to the moral clarity it strives for in foreign policy and may have set the United States on a course of open-ended and gratuitous conflict with states and nonstate entities that pose no serious threat to the United States. Of particular concern has been the conflation of al-Qaeda and Saddam Husseins Iraq as a single, undifferentiated terrorist threat. This was a strategic error of the first order because it ignored critical differences between the two in character, threat level, and susceptibility to U.S. deterrence and military action. The result has been an unnecessary preventive war of choice against a deterred Iraq that has created a new front in the Middle East for Islamic terrorism and diverted attention and resources away from securing the American homeland against further assault by an undeterrable al-Qaeda. The war against Iraq was not integral to the GWOT, but rather a detour from it. Additionally, most of the GWOTs declared objectives, which include the destruction of al-Qaeda and other transnational terrorist organizations, the transformation of Iraq into a prosperous, stable democracy, the democratization of the rest of the autocratic Middle East, the eradication of terrorism as a means of irregular warfare, and the (forcible, if necessary) termination of WMD proliferation to real and potential

enemies worldwide, are unrealistic and condemn the United States to a hopeless quest for absolute security. As such, the GWOTs goals are also politically, fiscally, and militarily unsustainable. Accordingly, the GWOT must be recalibrated to conform to concrete U.S. security interests and the limits of American power. The specific measures required include deconflation of the threat; substitution of credible deterrence for preventive war as the primary vehicle for dealing with rogue states seeking WMD; refocus of the GWOT first and foremost on al-Qaeda, its allies, and homeland security; preparation to settle in Iraq for stability over democracy (if the choice is forced upon us) and for international rather than U.S. responsibility for Iraqs future; and finally, a reassessment of U.S. military force levels, especially ground force levels. The GWOT as it has so far been defined and conducted is strategically unfocused, promises much more than it can deliver, and threatens to dissipate scarce U.S. military and other means over too many ends. It violates the fundamental strategic principles of discrimination and concentration.

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