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This is World War III

ON SEPT. 11, 1998, I began my tenure as the US ambassador to Tanzania sifting through the rubble of what was left of the US Embassy. I felt the same sense of horror, helplessness, shock, and anger that Americans feel now.

What I came to appreciate was that what happened in Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, and what was slated to happen in Kampala was not simply an act of terrorism. Those assaults in Africa were not meant simply to "get our attention" in the United States or chip away at our sense of invincibility. It was an act of war on a global scale. While Africa certainly might not be considered the first theater in the prosecution of this world war, the Dar-Nairobi offensive signaled that our enemies were prepared to fight us whenever they perceived us to have a presence or an interest.

While conventional wisdom

was that Dar and Nairobi were chosen simply because they were "soft targets," several things make that conclusion suspect.

Tanzania's historical significance in the global freedom movement, under ordinary circumstances, should have inhibited it from such attacks. After it received independence in 1961, Tanzania served as a safe haven for every subsequent liberation movement in sub-Saharan Africa. Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's founding father, was one of the founders and leaders of the Nonaligned Movement. Atypically, the death zone of these attacks was such that it had to result in the wholesale loss of life of children, women, and other innocents. These attacks were not the run-of-the-mill terrorist attacks as we had come to experience such acts of aggression.

Moreover, one of the culprits

implicated, and now convicted, in the Tanzanian bombing was apprehended in Cape Town, South Africa, the site of a number of terrorist actions.

While our policy makers, and certainly most of America, didn't perceive it, we have been involved in a war for some time. The problem was that we were the only ones not fighting.

Though our nation correctly views the assaults on New York and Washington as acts of war, we need to appreciate that this is a world war. Given the truly global nature of this struggle, what do we do?

First, we zero in on our military and security objectives. In the broad sense, our military objective is to capture as many of our enemies as possible and disrupt their war-making capacity.

Our security objective is equally clear. It is to insulate our country, allies, and strategic in-

terests from attack. That means sharing techniques and technology with our allies. It means dealing with such matters as energy security. We can and should anticipate that there will be some major effort to disrupt our access to Middle East oil. Given the assaults in Dar es Salaam, Nairobi, continued terrorist actions in Cape Town (which has major refinery capacity), and the unrest in Nigeria, we should anticipate that there will be efforts to make our access to these reserves difficult.

The more difficult strategic thrust in this "world war" is defining and carrying out our diplomatic objectives. The political isolation of these fanatical elements is a no-brainer. Fortunately, most of the world has stepped forward to pledge its support.

But while the isolation of these elements is critical, this is not our best weapon in this life and death struggle. Neither is our technological or intelligence superiority. The ultimate weapon we have is to propagate a way of life that offers humankind the

best opportunity to fulfill their God-given potential.

We must not lose sight of the fact that our enemies see the entire world as a theater for battle. We must develop a comprehensive game plan to encourage, support, and enable burgeoning democracies in Africa, Asia, Central and South America as well as Europe to take root. That means more than what we typically define as aid. It means sharing our technical know-how in terms of how to make democracy and free markets work. It means reconfiguring bilateral relationships so that the mutual benefits of engagement are clear.

Ultimately this final diplomatic objective is the challenge to which we must rise because the only real and lasting antidote to fanaticism is the alleviation of the poverty and discontent that incubate it.

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