

majority-Shiite Iran and away from Sunni Arab nations such as Saudi Arabia.

The traditional quid pro quo—American security guarantees for Saudi oil—no longer works for either side. It's been five years since Saudi Arabia could significantly influence oil prices. When Riyadh boosts production in an effort to lower prices, or pumps less oil to try to prevent a global price collapse, it fails. Another potential difficulty is the uncertainty of the nation's future leadership. Abdullah is 86 years old, and his designated successor is 85 and suffering from cancer. The king has established a council of his 35 half-brothers and their sons to select his heir, but the council is untested.

Even so, the United States and the kingdom retain common interests: Saudi Arabia has more oil than any other state, and America uses more. Both face threats from Al Qaeda and want to thwart Iran's nuclear and political ambitions. And the two nations expect each other to help solve the world's economic crisis. They manage to cooperate on counterterrorism, to hold joint military exercises, and to educate thousands of Saudis in American universities. They share the goal of stability in Pakistan and the Middle East, but the Saudis regard the buildup of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan as foolhardy.

The Obama administration, Ottaway writes, should seek cooperation where it can, and, in particular, strive for a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to restore Arab trust. The Saudis seek a quick U.S. economic recovery to

boost a depressed world economy and create a market for more oil. Putting their money where their mouth is, they have loyally supported the American dollar against pressure from other Arab states to calculate oil payments in other currencies. In this instance, their faith has been vindicated, Ottaway says. Other nations—even powerful China—have sought a safe harbor amid the economic crisis by buying more U.S. Treasury bonds.

## FOREIGN POLICY &amp; DEFENSE

## Terror Intelligence

**THE SOURCE:** "The 9/11 Attacks—A Study of Al Qaeda's Use of Intelligence and Counterintelligence" by Gaetano Joe Ilardi, in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, March 2009.

FOR MANY AMERICANS, AL Qaeda's slaughter of nearly 3,000 innocent people on 9/11 epitomizes irrationality, fanaticism, and madness. But, in fact, the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington in 2001 were slowly and meticulously planned over five or more years, then trained for, practiced, tested, and subjected to modified dry runs, notes Gaetano Joe Ilardi, a police officer and postdoctoral researcher at Monash University in the Australian state of Victoria.

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, mastermind of the 9/11 plot, cultivated expertise in an array of terrorism techniques, from car and aircraft bombing to political assassination and reservoir poisoning. When he briefed Osama

bin Laden in mid-1996 on his scheme to crash planes into buildings in the United States, bin Laden was initially noncommittal, apparently because he thought the plan was too complicated. But two years later, he was sold.

Within months, Khalid began collecting intelligence, Ilardi writes. Initially, he scanned aviation magazines and airline timetables, acquired flight simulator software, and watched hijacking movie thrillers. Soon, newly recruited suicide operatives were taking a short course on how to conduct reconnaissance. They cased planes they intended to hijack, sitting in first class to observe the cockpit doors, to see whether the captain entered the cabin during the flights, and to record the movements of the crew. One hijacker tried to hitch a ride in a cockpit jump seat by claiming that he was about to go to work for Egypt Air. He was kicked out when the crew realized he was lying; he failed in a second attempt to get inside the cockpit on the pretext of needing to retrieve a pen he had left behind. Multiple tests convinced the hijackers that the cockpit doors would be opened between 10 and 15 minutes into each flight. That allowed terrorists on different planes to gain access to the cockpit at approximately the same time.

In a test of potential weapons to gain control of the airplanes, a hijacker carried a box cutter into the cabin in his toiletries bag, then observed that when he took it out of his hand luggage, nobody paid

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any attention. This gave the hijackers confidence that box cutters would suffice to subdue the crews. The hijackers also conducted reconnaissance flights along both the Washington and New York corridors, observing how easy it was to spot the World Trade Center towers. Bin Laden was determined to attack the White House, Ilardi writes. But as testing and intelligence gathering stepped up, the Executive Mansion apparently fell off the list for “navigation reasons.”

The extensive surveillance and intelligence gathering convinced the hijackers that they were safe operating in the United States and that their plans had not been compromised. They moved around freely, getting stopped by the police for traffic violations, having their luggage randomly scanned, and complaining to the authorities about street crime. They could have done their training almost anywhere else in the world, but they chose the United States, their terrorist target. They spent months in the country because of their strong confidence in Al Qaeda’s intelligence-gathering and security measures.

An Islamic jihad handbook notes that U.S. intelligence was once considered so powerful that “if a mouse entered America or came out of it you should be able to find a report about it in the archives of the American intelligence services.” On 9/11, that myth was destroyed.

FOREIGN POLICY &amp; DEFENSE

## Winging It

**THE SOURCE:** “Flying High, Thinking Big” by Tom Ruby, in *The American Interest*, May–June 2009.

GEN. DAVID PETRAEUS MAY BE a towering figure to Army, Navy, and Marine Corps brass, but the Ph.D.-packing general’s views on the importance of higher education don’t seem to have penetrated the leadership of the Air Force, writes Tom Ruby, an Air Force colonel. The nation’s youngest military service has developed a culture of anti-intellectualism.

An Air Force general spelled it out to faculty at a service academy in 2007: Nothing is more important than “deploying,” the unnamed general announced, “certainly nothing we do here.” That view has consequences for the service’s best officers, warns Ruby, who is on the Headquarters Air Force staff and has served in combat and staff positions around the world. In recent promotion boards, officers who had taken time off to earn a doctorate fared poorly in comparison with those who hadn’t.

Experience is valuable but can be a “wasting asset” in the rapidly changing conditions of combat. Just because airpower worked in a par-

ticular way once doesn’t mean it will work the same way again, Ruby says. “Misapplying experience is perhaps the surest route to failure.”

Only 1.3 percent of the Air Force’s officer corps holds doctoral degrees, and many of them are in the hard sciences, critical to research and development. This leaves a paucity of top officials with degrees in other areas. And the Air Force doesn’t send enough of its best-educated officers into the field to raise the intellectual bar, nor does it send its most promotable and command-ready officers to teach at its staff and war colleges. “The Air Force places a greater value on a major who is about to graduate from a service school than on a lieutenant colonel graduate of the same school who stayed on as a faculty member,” Ruby says. The service sees the major as “potential,” the lieutenant colonel as someone who missed the boat.

The capacity for conceptualization that, ideally, is enhanced by higher education allows officers to deal with future threats outside the framework of their own experiences. During World War II, 31 of 35 U.S. Army corps commanders had taught at the service schools. Sophisticated military education helped them analyze the complexities they faced without relying solely on heroic leadership or experience, of which they had little to prepare them for such a conflict.

“They won a massive, two-front war in less than four years from a standing start,” Ruby says. “You don’t need a Ph.D. to see the lesson in that.”