The Big Three:
Our Greatest Security Risks and How to Address Them

by

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Report Documentation Page		*Form Approved* *OMB No. 0704-0188*
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.		
1. REPORT DATE **JUN 1995**	2. REPORT TYPE **N/A**	3. DATES COVERED **-**
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE **The Big Three: Our Greatest Security Risks and How to Address Them**		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER 5b. GRANT NUMBER 5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S) **Richard /Danzig**		5d. PROJECT NUMBER 5e. TASK NUMBER 5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **National Defense University Institute for National Strategic Studies Fort McNair Washington, DC 20319**		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR’S ACRONYM(S) 11. SPONSOR/MONITOR’S REPORT NUMBER(S)
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT **Approved for public release, distribution unlimited**		
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
14. ABSTRACT		
15. SUBJECT TERMS		

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			
unclassified	**unclassified**	**unclassified**	**UU**	**67**	

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std Z39-18

Prologue:
Thinking About the Future

The American national security establishment confronts many immediate problems: "Rogue states" attempt to bully their neighbors and attack U.S. interests; a war with Iraq has been followed by years of confrontation over sanctions and inspection; and a half-century after a major war in Korea, America still faces a constant and unpredictable threat on that peninsula. In addition, state-sponsored and independent terrorist groups explode bombs at American embassies, on U.S. bases, and in American airplanes. Nuclear, chemical and biological weapons are proliferating. Ethnic and national groups lock in conflict so extensive and bitter that even when U.S. interests are not directly at stake, as in Bosnia or Rwanda, there are imperatives for intervention. The challenges at the end of the 20th century are immensely demanding.

But beyond the present lie other, probably even more important, longer term issues. Commendably, U.S. policy makers have tried to attend to the long term. After the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, for example, the Department of Defense (DOD) emphasized the importance of "preventive defense." The Pentagon's 1997 *Quadrennial Defense Review* identified a need to "shape" the environment as well as to respond to crises. American policy has sought to be farsighted, to identify issues before they reach the point of crisis. There is widespread

barriers to the movement of goods, capital, and people and the sensitivity of markets make modern societies volatile. NEW weapons exploit this volatility. Though widely labeled as "weapons of mass destruction," they may even more effectively traumatize as "weapons of mass disruption."

"Traumatic attack" is the bastard child of our information age. Over the last decades, satellites, fiber optics, and computers have transformed communication. This change was first incorporated into warfare as a modification of means. Satellite and fiber communications have been embraced by the American military as speedier, more accessible, cheaper methods of performing familiar tasks—but the technology transforms ends as well as means. Though it may take some time to fully absorb the point, telecommunications can change the purpose of an attack.

Contemporary communication is immediate and ubiquitous and has a high amplification. It is immediate not only because it is quick, but also because it feels (often incorrectly) as though there is no intermediate actor to soften or distort what is received. What was once out of sight, and therefore largely out of mind, is now salient. What used to have little impact, because it was over, is now known while in process. Because there are so many channels of communication, and they are so accessible, news is ubiquitous. Elites no longer control information; therefore, they no longer control decisionmaking. Furthermore, by its own amplifying and echoing effects, contemporary communication induces wave reactions. Pivotal incidents reported, replayed, and colored by the media and private telecommunications catalyze investor, public opinion, and decisionmaker reactions that have disproportionately disruptive effects. The result can be not just NEW weapons, but also a new warfare.