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Dr. Ursula M. Wilder

Oklahoma City, 19 April 1995: A firefighter cradles a one-year old girl pulled from the rubble of a truck bomb attack, her curls stained with blood. (© Charles Porter IV/ZUMA Press/Corbis)

Beirut, 23 October 1983: A shirtless, dust covered and dazed US Marine lies half-prone on a stretcher as it is lifted over the rubble of the bombed barracks by fellow Marines, British troops, and local volunteers straining to get him to safety. (© Bill Foley/AP/Corbis)

Arlington, VA, 11 September 2001: A group of military and civilian recovery workers stand at the edge of the Pentagons roof and unfurl a large US flag near the damage inflicted in the buildings side by American Airlines Flight 77. (© Ron Sachs/CNP/Sygma/Corbis)

New York City, 11 September 2001: Three exhausted, grimy rescue and recovery workers in protective gear raise the US flag up a flagpole they place deep inside the pit of destroyed skyscrapers. (© *The Record*/Getty Images)

Boston, 15 April 2013: Three city police officers, having come to the aid of an elderly marathoner thrown to the ground by the first explosion, react to a second blast farther down the course. (© John Tlumak/*The Boston Globe*/Getty Images)

Counterterrorism Professionals Reflect on Their Work

Dr. Ursula M. Wilder

Entering its 60th year of exploring the work of intelligence, this journal has served to illuminate many aspects of the profession and its people. Most often it has addressed the field's history, its methods, and future development. Less often have Studies *authors examined the personal and psychological impact on intelligence professionals of the work itself.*

In this article, clinical psychologist Dr. Ursula Wilder explores the impact on counterterrorism professionals of the high intensity and high stress environments in which most of them have functioned, often for many years. For some, the work has involved actual combat or engagement with terrorists and their violent acts; for others it has meant bearing the weight of making decisions that affect many lives; and for still another group it has involved the intellectual labor of piercing through masses of intelligence reports and great uncertainty to locate terrorists or to warn others of potential terrorist acts.

While consideration of such questions may be relatively new to Studies, *the examination of the effects on human psychology of violence and difficult decisions is as old as recorded history, appearing in the West, for example, in works attributed to Homer and Shakespeare. Addressing war's consequences, moral dilemmas for leaders and led, the continuing presence in human memory and behavior of experience in violence, and the interaction of combat veterans with those who stayed home, these masterworks would provide insights for Dr. Jonathan Shay, the prominent early US researcher on posttraumatic stress in the Veteran's Administration, whose books on the subject,* Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character *(1994) and* Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming (2002), *would have great impact on this editor's understanding of his own responses to service in Vietnam as a young Marine infantry officer nearly 50 years ago. Shay's work would also spearhead a great deal of new scientific study—some of it highlighted in the appendix to this article—that seeks to refine the understanding of trauma, both under conditions that resemble battlefields and in high stress workplaces that focus on the kinds of issues and events that CT professionals, including intelligence officers, follow.—Editor.*

Images of Terrorism and Counterterrorism Professionals

Most readers will readily recall the iconic photographs on the facing page. These images are part of America's collective memory, and they capture the two opposing faces of terrorism. One represents the calamitous, dreadful nature of terror strikes; the viciousness of the political tactic; the anguish it causes innocent victims; the broader destruction of the tangible and intangible products of civilization; and the loss of the expectation of security and peace in public spaces.

The second, contrasting face reflected in these photographs is seen in the responders—the professionals whose jobs prompt them to move toward carnage to protect and provide succor to the wounded, to recover the dead, to record what transpired, or, after the fact, to study what happened to prevent more such events.

This other face—of people doing their duty and performing their jobs while braving physical and emotional hazards and suffering—is not the aspect of the terrorism drama that its perpetrators want to highlight, but it is one they have learned to exploit. In fact, many terrorist events are

planned so that first responders—police, medical personnel, members of the press, and bystanders who step up to help—will be struck by a second blast timed especially to harm them.

The responders captured in these images are heroes in the classical meaning of the word, which does not imply perfection of character or of performance but the opposite. The classical heroes of our Western literary tradition transcended the negative possibilities within their human natures to accomplish extraordinary things. These photographs show a more subtle form of courage—otherwise ordinary people behaving with

extraordinary bravery, intelligence, dedication, and perseverance for victims and for community. They also show us people who are struggling, afraid or in great pain, and are exhausted, physically and mentally.

This article is about the psychology of those who work to counter terrorism. It describes the complex responses to their work of people who labor across the range of counterterrorism (CT) vocations. Some had purposefully pursued work in CT, deliberately dedicating themselves to this work for a season or for a career. Many intelligence officers, academic experts, and professionals involved in political or policy work and various journalistic vocations fall in this self-selected group of CT professionals.

Other professionals found themselves thrown unexpectedly into CT because they became embroiled in

an act of terrorism near them that required the urgent deployment of their knowledge and skills. Local medical and emergency personnel, police, reporters, mental health practitioners, and morticians are examples of professionals who have increasingly been required since 9/11 to react to violence of this sort.

Whether CT professionals have been engaged in the work of counterterrorism by choice or by circumstances beyond their control, those who have stepped up to perform these jobs have been—and will continue to be—affected by their professional experiences, in ways subtle and profound and positive and negative. Often their loved ones have been affected, secondarily, but no less profoundly.

The author drew the reflections that follow this introduction from interviews with 57 CT professionals

from the main domains in the field. The interviews were conducted in 2012 while the author was an Intelligence Community Senior Executive Fellow at the Brookings Institution.[a] While those interviewed represent only a small, non-random portion of the CT enterprise, in which many thousands have worked, their personal reflections nevertheless provide an evocative picture of psychological trends that are likely to exist among their colleagues in the entire CT enterprise.

These reflections are also congruent with published research on the effects on people of violence, trauma, and highly stressful work. Relevant studies are detailed in an appendix beginning on page 13. These

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Scope and Method

The 57 counterterrorism professionals interviewed for this article came from many different CT fields, in both the public and private sectors. The interviews were conducted using a structured format, and, with one exception, the author interviewed everyone in person.

Participants were asked to reflect on their CT professions and their effects on them and to characterize their vocations' unique contributions to the overall CT enterprise. They were also asked to talk about their emotional, psychological, and interpersonal responses to their activities and to attempt to identify enduring effects of their work on themselves as well as on those closest to them, including colleagues, friends, and family. Finally, they described any deeper meanings— political, scientific, philosophical, spiritual—that this type of work evoked in them.

Interviewees in public service—at the federal and local levels—included former senior White House officials, Cabinet members, heads or deputy heads of federal agencies, ambassadors and other diplomats, intelligence officers from the covert collection and analytic arms of the Intelligence Community, as well as combat-seasoned military, federal, and local law enforcement officers and fire and rescue personnel. Private-sector interviewees included journalists

and war correspondents, emergency medical and private disaster relief personnel, members of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) who work in terrorism-prone regions of the world, scholars, and field researchers.

The people interviewed were diverse in age, CT experience, and station and rank within their professions and organizations. The group was ethnically and religiously mixed, and men and women were equally represented. Some had dealt with domestic terrorism only, but the majority had worked against both domestic and international terrorism. The majority had extensive international travel experience. Most were US citizens, but not all were born and raised within the US culture. Despite their diversity in professional vocation and experience, age, and background, they all had this in common: each man and woman had experienced direct and intensive professional experience with terrorism and its effects.

Each person interviewed was promised anonymity, and thus their specific stories cannot be recounted in detail for this article. Instead, this article includes text boxes describing publicly discussed analagous experiences of individuals in terrorist events in the United States.

The interviews revealed many commonalities across all three groups of CT professionals, commonalities both positive and negative.

include examinations of the effects on people not only of direct exposure to violence and suffering but also of persistent engagement for long hours in high stress conditions, such as those experienced by CT analysts and policymakers, even when they are physically far removed from terrorists and acts of terrorism.

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The CT Framework

The counterterrorism profession mainly comprises three domains of activity: leadership and policy, field professionals, and knowledge workers/analysts.

Leadership and policy. This domain's work centers on developing national CT laws and policies, including devising strategy and tactics and leading the execution of these policies. The group is responsible for heading up responses to unexpected terrorism events, nationally and internationally. Those interviewed in this group included White House officials, leaders of federal agencies responsible for national security, and Cabinet members who helped shape CT policy.

Knowledge workers. The work of this domain is to research, study, learn, interpret, and teach about terrorism and CT to the government, to the public, and to private-sector audiences. Those interviewed for this study included government analysts, private-sector scholars, academics and researchers, and journalists. Although most of these intellectuals spend a great deal of time in the field, the core of their work is cognitive and internal, and they do

not usually directly drive events in the field. When they do affect events, it is by communicating "actionable" assessments and by engaging with CT professionals in the field.

Field workers. Field professionals focus on engaging directly with terrorists and the acts of terrorists "on the ground." Among the CT professionals interviewed were diplomatic, military, covert intelligence, and law enforcement personnel; first responders such as medical and emergency management professionals; and NGO professionals from relief and research organizations. This is the most diverse group in terms of the range of their vocations and functions and their professional training.

These are people routinely "on location" with terrorism and terrorists. And although two major differences divided these professionals—some were armed and some were not and some worked for government and others did not—they were united by their personal, direct engagement with terrorism's actors and the consequences of terror strikes.

The Findings: General Positives and Negatives

The interviews revealed many commonalities across all three groups of CT professionals, commonalities both positive and negative.

The common positives

Members of all three groups said their CT work enriched them on individual, personal psychological levels

and in their interpersonal relationships with colleagues, family, friends, and community.

Most of these professionals felt that CT work was the most important of their professional careers and said that knowing this was very rewarding psychologically. They described their work as demanding, intense, and of high impact. Many who had experienced other types of work placed CT work in a category of its own in terms of psychological demands and rewards. One professional—an analyst who had dedicated her 30-year career to CT—stated that she never personally experienced the "crisis of meaning" many of her non-CT colleagues appeared to suffer at some point in their careers, and she summed up with the following statement:

> *There are no mid-life, existential crises in this job; I know what I did with my one and only career is meaningful, and so do* [the others] *around me* [doing the same work].

She did add, however, that there had been life crises in areas other than work because of the "obsessive" nature of her CT career.

Many noted that it was exciting to have a personal role, no matter how small, in historic events. Quite a few mentioned how performing their jobs inside of events that were playing on the "parallel universe" of TV and social media was both exhilarating and somewhat strange at the same time. Characterizing this aspect of CT work, one person said, "I felt I

> *These professionals noted that they came to appreciate the precious nature of life and of life's small pleasures because of the carnage of innocents and terrible, destructive nature of terrorism.*

had a bit part in an international passion play that the whole world was watching."

Believing that one's work had impact on specific events was a major reward for these professionals, a psychological positive that counterbalanced the parallel theme of tragic cynicism about the possibility of ever eliminating terrorism. Knowing that they were playing a role in preventing a recurrence of "terrible events traumatizing the nation," as one put it, or in bringing the perpetrators of terrorism to justice, or in comforting victims, was highly meaningful to the professionals.

On an introspective level, these professionals noted that they came to better appreciate the precious and fragile nature of life and of life's small pleasures because of the terrible, destructive nature of terrorism. One described it this way: "I have just become much more mindful of the treasure that is life and how quickly it can be destroyed."

Asked to identify examples of these "treasures," interviewees offered a favorite hobby, walking a dog, and appreciating nature. As counterpoints to the grim work, many spoke of turning to and appreciating the positives of culture, such as faith and religious activities, music and art, patriotic and communal traditions, sports, and community events.

More spoke of the ways CT work had helped them go beyond developing professional expertise to gaining wisdom. They seemed to feel that

they had acquired insight into the full range of human capabilities and behavior—as opposed to idealizing or demonizing human nature. One described this theme as follows:

> *When you do this type of work you have to work out for yourself why people can be so evil, and also so good. We are all human, right? So you need to think through your personal philosophy about responsibility, right and wrong. There are no easy answers, but everyone in* [CT work] *is forced eventually to* [address these issues] *and hard though it was, I am glad I was forced to. I'm a deeper person, maybe a better one.*

CT work also appeared to challenge some to review, and then revise, their more negative personal characteristics. Many noted that they had become more humble because they were inspired by the heroism of their colleagues or by other examples of human virtue. Some deepened their capacity for compassion as they studied terrorists whose lives appeared to drive them to profoundly distorted images of themselves and of the world around them. Some also said that—after seeing the negative examples of human behavior exhibited by terrorists—they vowed to control in themselves the attributes of arrogance, hubris, rigidity, and disregard for others masquerading as idealism, that characterizes terrorists.

One CT professional, having witnessed the consequences of

extreme versions of these attributes in terrorists—while at the same time witnessing the capacity for self-sacrifice and common decency in the first responders, in victims, and her fellow CT professionals—made the point that "personal egotism and narcissism seem immature" in contrast and perhaps dangerous. Another illustrated this theme by noting how, on 9/11, he noticed that rush-hour traffic patterns "for at least 24 hours" were sane and civilized because that day on the road, "no one wanted to add more aggression to the world after the planes."

On social and interpersonal levels, the CT professionals described deep rewards in their relationships both at work and in their private lives. They universally spoke about the pronounced rewards of working with trusted, respected, and dedicated colleagues. The words "humbled" or "privileged to serve among them" were used a lot. This was a ubiquitous positive.

With respect to relationships in private lives, many spoke of relying heavily on the understanding, dependability, and love of family and friends who provided steadying mental and emotional anchors into everyday realities. Many described incidents in which their most intimate friends and families stepped in directly to comfort or distract them after they had been dealing with particularly terrible events.

Many also spoke about how spouses and close friends told them when their work was changing for the worse their attitudes towards others, their outlook toward life, and their behavior, thus pulling them up short and preventing them from getting

"lost" in the thrilling but potentially destructive mindsets of work. One said of his wife:

> *She pulled me back from the brink of becoming obsessed, and not in a good way, with the terrorists* [his team was tracking]. *There was a whole world out there that was lost to me, for a while, because all I could think about was* [the terrorists]. *She used some very unflattering words to describe what I was like, told me I was becoming a complete* [a…e], *but she was right. It was my wake-up call.*

Through both tender and challenging interactions, the CT professionals reported that they came to value, respect, and cherish their intimate relationships and the characteristics of their loved ones all the more because of their generous and loyal responses to the pressures the jobs had put on their relationships.

The Common Negatives

The dark, negative sides of CT work were experienced to some degree by most of those interviewed. The interviews strikingly revealed how many of the negative themes are simply the obverse of positive ones.

Relative newcomers to the work tended to remark on the negatives in people they saw as "old-timers," perceiving in particular diminishment or distortions in their "outside" lives. For example, one young professional—still in her mid-20s—conjectured that senior CT leaders in the national security arena appeared to her to be "shadows of their former selves" after a post-9/11 decade in what she characterized as an "obsessive" focus on their jobs.

CT professionals with many years in the work tended to confirm her observation. Many who had moved on from CT to other work reported that they had chosen to leave CT because they felt that important aspects of their lives were being damaged or diminished, including their general outlook on life, on other people, and on humanity in general. Phrases these CT professionals used to allude to the dark side of the work included: "it takes a toll," "there is a distinct price," "loss of innocence," and "you can't go back to the way you were before."

Interviewees observed that, however rewarding it is, the work is inexorable. One professional said his CT job "colonizes everything." These jobs are capable of cannibalizing a professional's entire waking awareness, and sometimes sleeping consciousness as well. One professional quipped that he called his work "my Pac-Man job," referring to the classic video game of the 1980s in which voracious icons devoured everything in their paths.

"Colonizing" or "Pac-Man" jobs demand that other pleasurable or even essential elements of a well-rounded life yield to work requirements, sometimes overtly and sometimes more imperceptibly. Non-work routine activities can easily come to seem inconsequential in the face of the exciting, urgent, and relentless press of CT work, where claims of "life and death stakes" are not, in fact, exaggerations.

Essential over the long-term, but superficially fungible in the short-term, sustaining life activities such as

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time spent with family, commitment to community activities and friendship networks, or upkeep of pleasurable hobbies attenuate or fall away entirely. A professional immersed in CT work may shirk from necessary personal routines of self-care and wellness, such as attending to dressing and grooming habits, getting health checkups, taking exercise, attending to routine housekeeping. Eventually, personal and home life becomes a shambles.

The younger people interviewed worried that they would never find life partners, unless they found them at work; married-with-kids people worried they were both neglecting and missing their children's lives and being inattentive spouses; close-to-retirement people looked back on the costs and wondered if their golden years would be absent things that take decades to develop or maintain: longstanding friendships and established roles in the community, robust middle-age health, substantive contacts with extended families.

One professional in his 20s noted that, before he entered CT work—two years before the interview—he had been in the habit of spending an hour or so every evening sketching on what he described as a "really beat up" but treasured painter's easel; since middle-school this had been his primary method to "decompress and go Zen," but it stopped once he started an intelligence analyst's job in CT with its extended hours and intense focus. He described how, a few weekends before the interview, he had experienced the rare treat of having "a few hours to myself" at

Similarly, professionals noted that while their work is exciting and stimulating, it is easy to become so habituated to stimulation that a non-excited mental state seems abnormal.

home, which he decided to use to draw. When he went to his easel, he found a layer of dust on the markers in the pencil tray and yellowed paper tacked to the easel. Though he knew he had drawn the old sketch on the yellowed paper, on an emotional level he did not immediately recognize it as his own product; he felt entirely "separated" from his previously treasured artistic activity to explore and express his inner world. He noted wistfully that his drawing since entering CT had been limited to quick doodles at work on scrap paper or erasable whiteboards when he can "steal a moment." He wondered, "If I ever really try to get back to it, will there be anything left to draw with?"

Along the same lines, a female CT analyst noted that her houseplants had all essentially "withered" from inadequate care and that she had not planted her outside garden "for years…it's just survivors [from previous years of carefully planned planting], volunteers [self-seeded wild plants], and weeds now." A few of the analysts in CT mentioned not being able to indulge in reading novels for pleasure anymore; lightweight popular fictions could no longer engage and hold imaginations saturated with images, facts, or hypotheses about real violence and terrible deeds done or planned by actual villains.

Singly, such sacrifices of small personal pleasures and habits may seem incidental, but many small losses accumulated across multiple life domains over time shrink a person's lifestyle and consciousness down to

work alone, with the possible retention of a few necessary and unavoidable self-maintenance chores that often themselves are experienced not as the elements of healthy self-care but as irritating interruptions from the "real action" at the core of one's life—the CT job.

Furthermore, the violent, gruesome, and disturbing nature of terrorist strikes and the disquieting nature of the minds that plan such strikes are difficult to "turn off" or "tune out" of one's consciousness at will. Many of the professionals noted problems in shifting their attention away from the topic of terrorism, even when they needed or wanted to. The CT professionals said they felt like they are "always on"—for example, thinking about the next strike, or worrying if they had made the right calls or judgments to prevent future strikes or apprehend perpetrators, or just having problems letting go of memories of particularly gruesome and grim events.

Human beings exposed to such content need time to mentally and emotionally metabolize and come to terms with it. Even in situations where the professionals are not at work per se, CT may nevertheless occupy their consciousness; terrorist content pervades quiet moments where they should or want to be at ease, daydreaming or concentrating on other things.

This intrusion of work-related thoughts, memories, and worries is particularly bothersome during activities for leisure and respite—for

example, when attending worship events in their faith tradition or at a child's school activity or party or during sports events—when the professionals' minds should be free to relax. Instead, thoughts of work spoil intimate time with life partners or times when people want simply to be at ease or at peace within themselves.

This subliminal disquiet—which one professional termed "my mental tinnitus"—over time erodes creativity and vitality and the security of a stable lifestyle full of variety and psyche-sustaining relationships and activities. Like most aspects of the dark side, this invasive preoccupation with work is an obverse of one of the strongly positive aspects of CT described by the CT professionals: its enduring and inherent fascination and intellectual challenge. What is mentally engrossing becomes mentally intrusive.

Similarly, professionals noted that while their work is exciting and stimulating, it is easy to become so habituated to stimulation that a non-excited mental state seems abnormal—a feeling that leads some to inappropriate, sometimes reckless, behavior. In CT circles, phrases for this problem—though not always perceived as negatives—include "highly caffeinated" and "adrenaline junkies." These phrases came up so often in the interviews that it became apparent that a frenzied, hyped-up pace is a given in the work. Here again, the downside of living at this pace is a chronic inability to relax and, after people have moved into new jobs, an equal inability to find rewards and different kinds of stimulation in new assignments. Other work simply seems tame in comparison.

Some in government positions reported that they found being part of a chain of action that led to violence—particularly if innocents were inadvertently harmed—very difficult to accept. This was not because of moral qualms about the actions taken; it was simply that they had been part of killing, which even in the most ethical circumstances is very difficult for many people.[a]

Some who had experienced failure in their work, a category into which many of the generation of CT professionals who were working on 9/11 put themselves—described feelings of guilt. Every successful terror strike is experienced as a failure, in this view. This sense of failure and guilt is the dark side of a profession whose practitioners are acutely aware of (and rewarded by) its impact and their personal involvement. Thus, when faced with the possibility that they or their teams have failed, such professionals often respond with more frenzied efforts, further fueled by dread of repeated failure and its fatal consequences. Unfortunately, such fear can lead to unwelcome results, such as overcaution, a lack of imagination, and diminished capacity to take necessary risks.

a. A classic, though controversial, work on the psychological effect on people of killing other people, even for legitimate and lawful reasons, is Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Back Bay Books, 1996). However controversial, the book catalyzed many more studies conducted in a variety of contexts—from accidental death in traffic accidents, hospital emergency room failures, police and military use of lethal force, and correctional personnel involved in executions—which have supported Grossman's conclusions.

It should be evident that every element of this "dark side" will strain family relationships and friendship networks.

Many noted it was difficult to tolerate the public finger-pointing that ensued after successful terror strikes because these were interpreted as failure in the CT effort—whether on the policy, field, or scholarly sides of the enterprise. Others noted that listening to public debate and opinions about how "broken" any part of the CT enterprise was—while tolerable and entertaining before they started work in CT—became unbearable given the sacrifices they were making and watching their colleagues make to perform the work. This sense that listening to others discussing one's work is insufferable raises cognitive and social walls between individuals in the field and those outside of it, separating CT professionals from casual interaction with people around them.

Finally, the dark side of CT was especially salient in personal lives. One senior head of a federal agency noted that it "sombered [sic] my mood" and that his wife took steps to ensure he remained engaged in lighthearted activities, although she noted that it took awhile for him to "come back" after he left the work. Though many CT professionals reported that it was very rewarding to learn in more depth about people as they are—the good and the bad—through their work, one pays a price for daily, direct engagement with evil.

One price is that the work can breed cynicism, despair, melancholy, and self-loathing, especially in those who come to think that they, too, may have lurking within them the darker aspects of human nature. Many noted that they become more vigilant ("hyper alert" and "paranoid" were terms frequently raised) to potential dangers in the environment, particularly in regards to their children; such vigilance can make lightheartedness impossible. This is the obverse of coming to appreciate the fragility of life and therefore relishing the precious moments as they arrive.

It seemed very difficult for many not to experience much of the stuff of life as trivial, either occasionally or more persistently. One CT professional described "lawn mowing" controversies in his neighborhood with contempt—the eco-friendly neighbors wanting natural fields "at war" with the traditionalists pursuing emerald carpets in front of their houses. What had seemed amusing before had become intensely annoying and small minded to his CT-oriented ear.

Another mentioned going after a particularly grueling day to a toddler's birthday party—as a peer and friend of the grandparents—and feeling disaffected—"over-sugared toddlers, stressed parents, and proud grandparents"—and thinking: "I have nothing in common with these people." A third mentioned being at a sporting event and not being able to "get into it"—and being frightened and unsettled by both intrusive thoughts of how bombs in the crowd would be an effective terror strike and also by his general alienation from the fun and horseplay of the young family members around him. One summed this up by saying: "So much came to seem trivial to me, but I realize life is enjoyed in the precious trivial moments, which for a while were lost to me."

Responses Unique to the Three CT Domains

While most in the CT profession share much of the foregoing, there were differences in the nature and depth of positive and negative responses among the three categories of CT work.

Leadership and Policy Professionals

Members of the leadership and policy group within the CT enterprise described their experiences using metaphors such as circus master, martial artist, and orchestra conductor. These captured the rewards of being at the center of events and directing large groups of competent professionals with a wide audience observing the action.
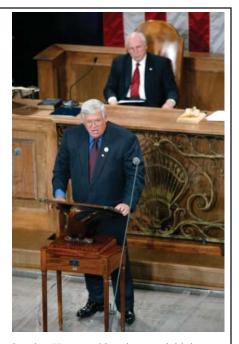
The political leaders interviewed for this study described many terrorism crises in which their leadership was completely engaged. (See right.) They spoke of the way in which meeting difficult challenges required their intense focus and of how their efforts provided the highest tests of their political acumen and skill. They also spoke of the extraordinary trust that developed among the members of their teams. Not surprisingly, successes brought enjoyment—even exhilaration—to them and their teams, together with the sense they had been rewarded above and beyond any public applause they might have won.

Psychologists use the word "flow" to describe the state of mind successful CT leaders described above. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi—a pioneer in "positive psychology," the study of sources of human happiness, satisfaction, and creativity—characterized

flow as the supreme human mental state because it is both deeply pleasurable and productive.[a]

Negatives for this group included a heightened sense of threat; as one described it, "I came to see the world as bristling with threats—ones

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a. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (Harper & Row, 1990) and *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (Harper & Row, 1996).

I knew about, ones I did not." They noted how difficult it was to shift attention to other important policy matters once they were aware of a terror threat. One White House official used the following hypothetical example: "If the president hears at 9:00 a.m. that there is good information that cargo planes carrying bombs are on their way to the United States, he is going to have trouble shifting his mind to education policy in the developing world."

Former Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert Remembering 9/11

Speaking 10 years after 9/11, Hastert explained what the political and leadership vocation in counterterrorism involved on the day of the attacks and their aftermath, capturing the essence of this vocation's responsibilities in the CT context:

We had to get the country back going again. I mean, not only the airlines. We needed to get airlines and build buildings, but the stock market was down, and the telecommunications system was down because the AT&T building was right next to the World Trade tower. So people in Lower Manhattan didn't have any communications. Our market system, the way we do business, was shut down. We had to get the subway going. We had to take care of the survivors of 3,000 victims. All those things. We had so much coming at us, we just took off our coats and rolled up our sleeves and went to work. You're doing those things, and there wasn't a lot of time to reflect whether you're doing the right thing. I suppose in retrospect, Monday morning quarterback, there's some things we could have done different. But we're trying to get things done and having to get it done as quickly as possible. Because we didn't have time to dawdle.*

Speaker Hastert addressing special joint session of the Senate and House in New York City's Federal Hall on 6 September 2012. (Photo © Martin H. Simon/Corbis)

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* Dennis Hastert, "Remembering 9/11," in http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2011/09/07/remembering_911_former_speaker_of_the_house_dennis_hastert_r-ill_111218.html; see also C-Span interview by Steven Scully, "Former House Speaker Dennis Hastert on September 11, 2001," 12 July 2011.

For leaders who have experienced failure to protect the public, the guilt and anger are profound; one noted that after a failure it became hard to keep an open mind to experimental and creative political solutions. Several noted that the ethical conundrums are particularly difficult in CT policy work, and leaders are often required to choose "the least bad option." Terrorism can sap the optimism and buoyancy of those who lead the effort to counter it because they must always choose among negative options.

Finally, several noted the irony that the more power one has, the more helpless one feels. One reported, with some humor, that he was told by those tasked to execute his policy to "please stop calling and asking for updates" because it was distracting and interrupted their "flow."

Knowledge Workers—Custodians of Truth

Among those whose work is focused on research, analysis, and communication there are profound rewards in the challenge of intellectually grappling with terrorism as a topic of study. Moreoever, because their work is unusually closely connected to CT actions in the world, they get both intellectual and more pragmatic rewards in seeing their endeavors lead to success.

Also rewarding to knowledge workers is the realization that their work requires steadiness of character and moral courage. They see themselves as responsible for finding the truth and speaking it to leaders or field professionals, at times when these partners in the CT enterprise may be disinclined to listen. For

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> ### Working through the Horrors: Two Photographers Remember
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> Boston Marathon photographer John Tlumacki said about his experience taking photos at the 2013 bombing at the site of the first of two explosions: "I was so shook up about it—I was speechless when I was there [on scene]. My eyes were swelling up behind my camera. We use a camera as a defense but I was shaken when I got back, just scanning the pictures. The other sad part was that I took my shoes off because they were covered in blood from walking on the sidewalk taking pictures…I always wondered what it would be like when I see photographers covering this stuff all over the world. You go to Israel and then there's an explosion and photographers are there. It's haunting to be a journalist and have to cover it. I don't ever want to have to do that again." Tlumacki captured the iconic shot of the three policemen hovering over the fallen marathoner at the moment the second explosion occurred (see frontispiece of this article).*
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> A second photographer, freelance Bill Hoenk, was on hand to document the chaotic aftermath at the site of the second explosion. One of his photographs, showing a Boston police officer carrying a wounded child, was the cover image of TIME's 6 May 2013 tablet-only edition, "Special Report on the Marathon Bombing." He was there to cover a peaceful community event; but as soon as the bombs went off he began photographing the scene around him, going "into a zone," as he described it. "I was horrified by what I was seeing, but there was some sort of instinct that said, don't worry about that, just keep shooting, because you're the only person with a camera around that I could see and it needs to be done. So I kept shooting…I saw the cop lift up the baby. When I look at the photos, I cry. The baby was screaming."**
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> Both of these photographers continued to do their jobs in the inferno, and both experienced very human, anguished responses while they did so.
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> * "Tragedy in Boston: One Photographer's Eyewitness Account," in LightBox http://lightbox. time.com/2013/04/15/tragedy-in-boston-one-photographers-eyewitness-account, 15 April 2013.
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> ** "A Photographer's View of the Carnage: "When I Look at the Photos, I Cry," in LightBox http://lightbox.time.com/2013/04/16/a-photographers-view-of-the-carnage-when-i-look-at-the-photos-i-cry, 15 April 2013.

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example, many saw themselves as instrumental in de-escalating hasty reponses in crisis situations or after calamitous events by bringing into decisionmaking facts, perspective, and truth—in the form of longer views of history and cooler assessments of the future implications of actions—when others in the CT enterprise are under pressure to react decisively to acute threats or events.

The negatives for knowledge workers included suffering what quite a few described as "OCD" (obsessive/compulsive disorder), meaning they constantly felt the urge to check and recheck data to make sure they had not overlooked something or missed new and important developments. Many noted they have lost sleep ruminating overnight about the subjects they were trying to make sense of.

It was striking how many CT analysts working in September 2001 felt guilt and blame, either for "missing" the imminent attacks or for being unable to make key leaders pay attention to the danger their instincts told them was approaching. Many noted

how they suffered from "anticipatory dread," their intellectual instincts and expertise telling them that something was going to happen—often associated with the maddening phenomenon of "increased chatter." Some analysts described the sense that serving as "custodians of the truth" in CT can be a curse—if no one will pay attention. They felt like Cassandra, the prophetess of Troy, cursed to see impending disaster but unable to get others to take her warnings seriously.

Field Professionals

This was the most diverse group of interviewees; it included those who bear arms—military people, police officers—and those who do not—emergency responders, medical personnel, diplomats, journalists and researchers, and charitable organizations. All had done most of their CT work on the battle ground of terrorism—directly dealing with terrorists, participating in strikes against terrorists, and dealing with the aftermath of terrorist events.

Like the knowledge workers who spoke of intellectual courage, many field professionals said their work involved tests of courage—in their cases physical courage—and they valued passing the tests. Some mentioned that they had come to better understand that courage was about being terrified yet persevering.

The field professionals expressed particularly strong affection and admiration for colleagues with whom they had shared hardships and victories; they noted that colleagues in CT teams forged lifelong friendships. Field work can be fun—irrespective of the grim contents of terrorism. It can bring a sense of adventure, of experimentation and spontaneous diversion with the unexpected—and,

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Peter Stefan: Unintended CT Professional

After the Worcester, MA, undertaker Peter Stefan agreed to handle funeral arrangements for Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the Boston Marathon terrorist killed as he attempted to avoid arrest, Stefan was besieged by criticism, picketers, and threatening phone calls. He was called a traitor and un-American.

In an interview he gave while he still had custody of the body and was contending with the hostility, Stefan stated that his funeral home was responsible for ensuring that the burial was conducted properly and he therefore would not simply ship the body away from the region: "I want to know for a fact that once I get him there, that someone's going to do something and bury him, not go back and forth and hold the body there because he's a terrorist or whatever they want to call him…I'm not just going to send the body out. I don't care who it is. This isn't what we do."* In a later interview, he provided more reflections about his vocational ethics: "But you can't bury only people who are on the straight and narrow. What are you going to do with the rest of them? We're not barbarians here. We bury the dead."

In maintaining his stand, Stefan provided another example of how average people—even when unexpectedly pulled into the terrorism vortex—manage to do their jobs with dignity and professionalism, irrespective of the adversity, anger, fear, and confusion terrorist acts create.

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* NPR News, "All Things Considered," 6 May 2013.

** Associated Press, "Book Planned on Burial of Marathon Bombing Suspect," 30 April 2014.

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from time to time, crackpot humor. One young field officer described enjoying singing at the top of her voice with fellow teammates—all in flak jackets, helmets, and heavily armed—whenever they were required to use military transport to move cross-country.

The sense of victory—of engaging the enemy and winning—was very strong and rewarding. One FBI special agent described the rewards of "bringing some justice to the victims and families" by tracking

terrorist perpetrators and seeing them either arrested or killed in action. What these field professionals described are what psychologists call "peak experiences," unique, unforgettable, treasured events that affect all experiences after. Many noted that after their field work, life seemed more satisfying.

The negatives of field work were equally salient, occasionally reflected in the "thousand-yard stares" of those who have seen the horror, touched the carnage, heard the cries

of victims and families, and have smelled the stench of terrorist strikes, none of which can ever be expunged. Witnessing such things can haunt a person for life. They also reported experiencing three types of separation – from their past selves ("you can't go home again"); from others around them in the present, including colleagues and family and friends ("you have to have been there to understand"); and from the future as they had envisioned it before their experiences in CT ("nothing will ever compare"; "I can't let go of it and move on").

Many noted that field work can be "addictive," but not in a good way. For some haunted professionals it has become the only place they feel truly at home, because they crave the excitement or because every place else seems alien and tame. Such people have become detached from their own selves, mired in a present where they can only feel at home in the CT field while precluding many alternative possibilities for their futures. More generally, the author notes that the field professionals described the greatest incidence of psychiatric symptoms such as insomnia and nightmares, hypervigilance even in safe places, and emotional numbing.

A very senior diplomat described being the target of terrorists; he took this in stride and learned to work with his protective detail wherever he went. What he could not easily let go of—long after his retirement—was that his wife and children were also explicit targets, as were most embassy personnel, who did not have protective details. His wife made a joke of how she learned to check under her car with a mirror before loading the kids for a drive and about having armed men around her family while they enjoyed the beach—but the husband, the CT professional, was unable to share the joke. Although more than willing to take on risks himself, he remained ambivalent about how his work had endangered those he loved most and those he was directly responsible for.

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In Sum

The stories CT professionals tell invoke questions that ancient, classical storytellers explored in their tales of heroes in conflict. How do human beings flourish when their work takes them into the heart of darkness? How do they rise to meet challenges involving unspeakable cruelty and violence and yet remain unharmed psychologically? And, more specifically, what do their stories tell us about the price individuals pay psychologically,

emotionally, and interpersonally for the service and rewards of CT work? How can the costs be mitigated by institutional and other means of support? All the CT professionals whose insights have been reflected in this article confronted the very questions explored in the ancient stories.

Those outside the CT community who have observed the labors of these professionals have been reminded of the human capacity for common decency and sacrifice for the sake of others; of the individual's potential to transcend typical human frailties and achieve great things; of our shared human ability to exercise leadership, show courage, demonstrate insight, and accrue wisdom. These professionals serve as reminders that the capacity for heroism lives within ordinary people, people who do not aspire to win trophies or become demigods.

And finally, perhaps their greatest act of "counterterrorism" may be the example they provide to others that the worst of human nature, as seen in the grandiose fantasies and atrocities of terrorists, will be met by the best in human nature as seen in those who step up to counter terrorists. In so doing they reveal the true quality of heroism.

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Appendix: A Review of Literature on the Psychology of Trauma and Stress

Three research streams in psychiatry, clinical psychology, and organizational psychology and management science are particularly germane to psychological responses and the work conditions described by the CT

professionals who were interviewed for this project.

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Psychological Trauma and On-the-Job Exposure to Violence and Suffering

A constellation of mental health diagnoses—most notably depression and anxiety, substance abuse disor-

ders, posttraumatic stress responses, and marital and family problems—are associated with jobs that expose personnel to violence and to seeing other human beings experiencing violence and danger. People who routinely encounter such exposure include US military service members in war and combat;[1] journalists, particularly war and violent crime correspondents;[2] "first responders" and rescuers, such as police and fire control personnel; and emergency room staff.[3]

The 2013 edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders—Version 5 (DSM-V)[4]—expanded the triggers that may lead to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to include indirect exposure through media to violence and gruesome content, so long as this indirect exposure happens as a result of work and not by personal choice or happenstance. Examples would include police investigating online crimes of violence and exploitation, counter-terrorism analysts studying terrorism imaging, and production and imagery personnel sorting through "raw" photo streams when preparing content for publication in journals and newspapers. This indirect psychological risk factor has now been judged to be a matter of occupational health, alongside the psychological risks that ensue from directly experiencing violence and its effects on victims.

In addition to the risks ensuing from direct and indirect exposure to trauma triggers, many professionals carry the risk of "vicarious" trauma—sometimes called "secondary trauma." The trigger in this case is personal empathic engagement with victims, resulting in psychological immersion in their inner world of pain and anguish. Unsurprisingly, caregivers, for example clergy, mental health counselors, teachers, and medical personnel, are most at risk for vicarious trauma. Journalists and scholars whose jobs require them to conduct one-on-one interviews and record the stories of victims are also at risk. The terms "compassion fatigue" or "caregiver burnout" are often used to capture some of the consequences of vicarious trauma.[5]

Families are also at risk for vicarious trauma, particularly children. Post-9/11 studies of children in and around New York City have established that many developed symptoms of traumatic stress and associated mental disorders through overhearing parents and other adult loved ones process with each other the events of that day, for example fleeing burning buildings or the city on foot after the twin towers collapsed.[6]

Whether trauma, stress, or other negative mental health responses are associated with direct, indirect, or vicarious exposure to triggers, these mental health effects are a drain on the vitality and quality of life of the professionals who endure them and those close to these professionals.

The Modern Icarus: The Effect of Extreme Jobs and Overwork

In the classical legend, Icarus was a young man who, equipped with magnificent wings made of feathers and wax, ignored advice from his father to keep a level course between earth and sky and instead flew directly toward the sun; his wings melted, and he fell to the ground and died. This cautionary tale of hubris and pushing beyond human limits finds a modern incarnation in studies about the dangerous allure and injurious effects of so-called "extreme jobs." Although employees and organizations alike may view extreme jobs and the dedication it takes to perform them as noble expressions of talent, ambition, and drive, the growing consensus of researchers is that their impact on individuals, groups, and institutions is destructive.[7]

Mental health practitioners often label chronic overwork as "compulsive" or characterize it as "the respectable addiction,"[8] implying in the first case that the worker no longer drives the job but is driven by it, and in the second case that the job's effects on the person are as dire as physical addiction to a substance.[9] The CT professionals' descriptions of being in the grip of intense, exhilarating, spellbinding work that over time depletes the rest of their lives echoes both the ancient tale of Icarus and the modern research.

Studies of "extreme jobs" look at "meta-conditions"—that is, the high number of hours-per-week they require, or the high degree of unpredictability and disproportionate level of responsibility inherent in them. Aside from their exposure to the psychological risks of confronting gruesome and terrible subject matter, CT work mimics these meta-conditions and confers the same risks found in any "extreme job." These conditions include routine work weeks of 60 hours or longer—where 10-hour days are perceived as normal and expected—plus four other ubiquitous elements that create chronic intensity and pressure: unpredictability, fast pace with tight deadlines, work intru-

sion on personal time, and 24/7 client demands.[10]

People who have extreme jobs describe the following rewards: excitement, impact or prestige, and working with valued and similarly elite peers. All of these considerable rewards resemble those described by CT professionals.

The downsides of extreme jobs involve both physical and mental problems. Scholars in this domain have consistently found that their research subjects report the following cognitive and physical problems: memory loss, erosion of attention and concentration, insomnia, weight gain, fertility problems, stomach and gastro-intestinal issues, high blood pressure, and eye twitch. On the psychological or behavioral health side, subjects commonly report drinking too much and "crashing" at the end of the day, and that their job stress has a negative impact on their sex lives and also on their children's behavior and adjustment. Just as the positives of extreme jobs parallel those reported by CT professionals, so too do these negatives echo the toll extracted by work described by those in CT.

Human Resilience and Transcendence

Over the past four decades, there has been extensive attention to a domain of behavioral study somewhat awkwardly termed "Positive Psychology."[11] Proponents of this psychological framework—which incorporates personality, developmental, clinical, and social psychology—focus on defining and enhancing human strengths and positive behavioral health, as opposed to concentrating solely on psychopathology or on explicitly damaging or negative behavioral variables. Practitioners of positive psychology have developed methods to buttress psychological resilience in the face of adversity. These efforts have permitted scholars to explore what enables people to be psychologically hardy even in terrible circumstances and also to spell out psychological gains that might actually arise from bad experiences.[12]

The US military, in particular, has invested in formal resilience training. Although studies of military veterans suggest that as many as one third experience deleterious mental and emotional effects from experiences in war, the majority function very well during and after their experiences, are proud of their service, and report that they would repeat their experiences again despite also acknowledging some adjustment issues, many centering on reentry into civilian life.[13]

US military data has recorded a set of positive psychological outcomes that ensue from war deployments, such as respect for one's leadership abilities, competence, and character strengths; respect for one's peers; and renewed appreciation for life and for new possibilities.[14] Psychological gains from transcending traumatic stress responses—a constellation of mental health gains often labelled "posttraumatic growth"—are reminiscent of gains that accrue in what psychologists call "normal adult development" (in other words, increasing maturity).

These gains parallel many of the positives reported by the CT professionals who were interviewed for this study. They include: a sense of mastery and wisdom, growth in skill, in knowledge, in confidence, and in agility in dealing with the challenges of life.[15]

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