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Public Speaking Speech 4 – The Persuasive Speech

Task

Prepare a speech that is intended to persuade the audience on a topic.

Full-Sentence Outline of the Speech

- I. Begin with a contrast of the number of deaths from terrorism and hunger on September 11, 2001.
- II. The policies of the current administration derive from a preoccupation with terrorism.
 - A. The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were premised on fighting terrorism.
 - B. The USA PATRIOT Act was presented as necessary to strengthen security.
 - C. It is hard to find a speech by President Bush that does not refer to the War on Terrorism.
- III. Present statistics to show that, in terms of the number of consequent deaths, terrorism is of relatively minor concern.
- IV. Present statistics on other causes of death in the US and around the world to put terrorism in perspective.
- V. Terrorism is an irrational preoccupation because it is immediate and visible rather than slow and cumulative.
 - A. Read and explain Mark Twain's quote to support this idea.
- VI. Compare "homeland defense" spending to possible AIDS spending as an example of how our obsession with terrorism comes at great expense to other areas of preventable mortality.

The Speech

¹⁾ How many lives were lost in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001? *Write “3,000” on the board.* ²⁾ Approximately how many people died of hunger on that same day, September 11, 2001. *Write “24,000” on the board.*

¹⁾ Some believe that terrorism is the greatest threat to the security of the American people. ²⁾ Certainly the policies of the current administration would lead to that conclusion. ^{a)} Our interventions in both Afghanistan and Iraq were premised on fighting terrorism. ^{b)} We have been expected to accept the loss of some of our civil liberties in the form of the USA PATRIOT Act ^{c)} and to acquiesce to greater government secrecy in the name of “national security.” ^{d)} It is hard to find a speech by President Bush that does not in some way refer to his paramount national goal: the War on Terrorism.

¹⁾ And yet, when the number of consequent deaths is our standard of comparison—as well it should be—terrorism is of relatively minor concern. ²⁾ Besides the 3,000 Americans killed on September 11, 2001, only four other Americans have been killed by terrorists within US borders since 1997.

Compare this to other causes of death in the United States. ¹⁾ In 2000, tobacco killed **435,000** Americans. ²⁾ In the same year, **400,000** Americans were killed by poor diets and lack of exercise. ³⁾ Alcohol killed **85,000** Americans in 2000, not counting accidents from drunk

driving. ⁴⁾ More Americans—**3,200**—died from drowning than from terrorism in 2001.

The global situation is far more staggering. ¹⁾ **8.8 million** people worldwide die every year from hunger and hunger-related causes. ²⁾ **6.2 million** people are killed each year by treatable diseases like AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis!

¹⁾ Given these statistics, what makes terrorism such an irrational obsession for so many Americans? ^{a)} For one thing, ¹⁾ its unexpectedness ¹⁾ and the understanding that it is a deliberate slaughter of human life make it more terrifying than other causes of death. ^{b)} Moreover, terrorism is immediate, visible, and, hence, memorable; hunger, poverty, and environmental degradation are slow, silent, and too often forgotten. ³⁾ Mark Twain captured the concept well in this passage from *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*:

“There were two ‘Reigns of Terror,’ if we could but remember and consider it; the one wrought murder in hot passions, the other in heartless cold blood; the one lasted mere months, the other had lasted a thousand years; the one inflicted death upon a thousand persons, the other upon a hundred million; but our shudders are all for the ‘horrors’ of the... momentary Terror, so to speak; whereas, what is the horror of swift death by the axe compared with lifelong death from hunger, cold, insult, cruelty, and heartbreak? A city

cemetery could contain the coffins filled by that brief Terror which we have all been so diligently taught to shiver at and mourn over; but all France could hardly contain the coffins filled by that older and real Terror—that unspeakable bitter and awful Terror which none of us has been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves.”

⁴⁾ Twain may have been referring to the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution of the late 1700s, but his insight into human nature—concerning our natural emotional tendency to focus on violence that is immediate and visible rather than slow and cumulative—remains true today.

¹⁾ This tendency may be natural, but it does not make for sound public policy. ²⁾ By focusing so much of our money and attention on the singular priority of terrorism, we neglect countless other areas of preventable mortality that are in much greater need of our efforts. ³⁾ The current administration hopes to spend at least **\$50 billion** every year on homeland security. ⁴⁾ This is at the same time that an increase of just **\$1 billion**—1/50 of that amount—in our spending on worldwide AIDS programs could prevent an additional **1.6 million** people from contracting HIV/AIDS within the first year of the programs and could treat **400,000** people who would otherwise die within two years!

Programs like these have the potential to save far more lives than domestic antiterrorism efforts ever will.

¹⁾ The threat of terrorism is not nonexistent; it is real, and it does result in hundreds of tragic deaths every year around the world. ²⁾ But it must be put in perspective. ³⁾ If we continue to devote so much of our energy to terrorism—both as individuals and as a nation—we will lose sight of those other areas of human need in which we have the potential to save countless more lives.