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UNRAVELING AL QAEDA'S STRATEGY

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy.

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Abstract


ging the effectiveness of the U.S. strategy to counter international terrorism requires first an understanding of the objectives, ways and means, and implementation strategy of the adversary. In this case, the adversary is Al Qaeda and its network of affiliated regional terrorist organizations. Despite claims of ignorance by policy makers and pundits as to Al Qaeda's aims immediately following the attacks of September 11th, the evidence suggests the terrorists' intent is, and always has been, clear. Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and other Islamic extremist leaders, have repeatedly outlined their goals and grievances in exceedingly unambiguous terms. The first objective, in the narrow context, is to remove U.S. military presence from the Arabian Peninsula, and in the broader sense to eliminate or significantly reduce U.S. influence in the Islamic world. The second is to remove the secular governments in the region, principally stated as those of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and replace them with Islamic theocracies. The third is to eliminate the state of Israel and purge the Arab peninsula of Jewish and Christian influence. These objectives run inherently counter to U.S. vital national interests, not only in the Middle East but also globally. Thus, an overarching and coherent strategy is essential to counter the threat posed by Al Qaeda and its international extremist network. The U.S. counter-terror strategy leading up to the September 11th attacks was not only disjointed and unfocused but suffered from an inability to define the threat. As the United States comes to terms with the nature and root causes of global terrorism, subsequent counter-terror strategies should become more coherent and effective. Recent changes are encouraging but there is still a long way to go before the strategy matches the task and policies adhere to the strategy.

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Unraveling Al Qaeda's Strategy

Introduction

Despite the fact that Osama bin Laden had openly declared war on the United States years before September 11th, 2001, and had made clear Al Qaeda's global objectives even earlier, the U.S. strategy to counter the scourge of international terrorism remains mired in a state of defined obscurity nearly four years after the attacks. In order to develop an effective counter-terror strategy, the United States must: (1) Define the threat for what it is – a global Islamic extremist insurrection; (2) Understand Al Qaeda's central role and strategic approach to achieving its global objectives; (3) Address each specific aspect of Al Qaeda's efforts individually and the overall strategy as a whole. In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11th some headway has been made; however, today U.S. counter terror strategy remains primarily grounded in military efforts to capture or kill *terrorists*. Although this may be an important component in the Global War on Terror (GWOT) it does nothing to address the environment which supports the growing global extremist movement. In fact, until recently there has been little evidence to suggest the United States has settled on a clear understanding of just who or what the enemy is.

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center Towers and Pentagon marked a watershed in how the United States and the rest of the world looked at the problem of international terrorism. The horrific images of airliners slamming into the Towers and the buildings collapsing in a pile of rubble illustrated a shift in terror tactics and opened the world's eyes to the magnitude and ominous potential of the threat. Overnight, Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden became household names and the phenomenon of global terrorism became the water cooler topic of the week. The number 911

took on a whole new meaning and American's would never again think of it solely as a number to dial in case of emergency.

Americans everywhere found themselves asking questions -- Who did this? How could this happen here in America? Why would someone hijack airliners to turn them into suicide cruise missiles and crash them into buildings? Why do they hate us so much? What do they want? Would they or could they do it again, and if they did, would it be worse next time? These are all questions Americans should have already known the answers to if they had only paid attention to what Bin Laden and his extremist colleagues had been saying and preaching for years. By now the answers to these questions should be clearly understood by American citizens and policy makers alike. However, nearly four years after the attacks, the United States is still struggling to find the answers and to define the nemesis that is the threat of international terrorism.

The events of September 11th not only marked a shift in how we looked at terrorism but also how we responded as a nation. The attacks set America on a new path; a path of direct action, of preemption against terrorists and nations who sponsor them. Bin Laden had "crossed the line". No longer would we be able to launch cruise missiles into the desert and "call it even". From the U.S. perspective Bin Laden had changed the game. From Bin Laden's perspective however, although the September 11th attacks marked a change in American popular perceptions and governmental reactions, they represented only the latest escalatory step for a calculating, capable, adaptive and determined adversary.

Al Qaeda

“Know the enemy and know yourself, in a hundred battles you will never be in peril. When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal. If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril”

(Sun Tzu)

“Ibn al Abeda” Son of the slave: Osama bin Laden

Any attempt to examine the motives of an adversary must start with a clear understanding of what makes the individual who they are and what they identify with. To this fact there are a few key points which must be made to understand Osama bin Laden and the context from which he developed into the world's most wanted terrorist. Adam Robinson in his book, *Bin Laden: Behind the Mask of the Terrorist*, outlines bin Laden's early years and establishes a solid foundation to understanding the trials and tribulations he went through as a child and as a young man and how his motivations and attitudes have evolved over time. Osama bin Laden was born in the summer of 1957 in Saudi Arabia. His father Mohammad, was a Yemeni immigrant turned self-made billionaire business tycoon who had long standing close ties with the Saudi royal family (Robinson, A., 2002). Robinson establishes how Osama grew up in his father's home but without his Syrian mother Hamida. According to Robinson, Mohammad maintained four wives, three of which would be considered “permanent” while he routinely divorced and re-married the fourth. Osama's mother Hamida was one of the wives who would be considered replaceable. The relationship between Mohammad and Hamida became strained early on. Hamida quickly became ostracized by the family soon after Osama was born and was forced to live away. Mohammad's other wives and 54 siblings labeled her “the slave” and Osama “Ibn al Abeda” meaning “Son of the

Slave” (Robinson, 2002). Robinson asserts that the continuous torment as a child, coupled with growing up without the loving relationship only his mother could offer, left significant scars; and a deep feeling of resentment greatly influenced his perspective and motivations as he matured (Robinson, 2004). One could argue whether or not this is important to understanding Bin Laden’s motivations, goals or strategy. If not critical, it is certainly relevant to helping understand his mindset. Robinson goes on to describe how bin Laden went on to attend high school in Lebanon where he soon became enamored with some of the most degenerate vices of western society. Gambling, heavy drinking, night clubs and prostitutes became his main occupation as his schooling took a backseat to the nightlife. He was called back to Saudi Arabia by his family when the violence leading up to Lebanon’s civil war started in 1975 and was sent to study at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah. Robinson states how bin Laden resented the closed Saudi society and continued his drinking until 1977, when he made the traditional Muslim Hajj pilgrimage. By all accounts, according to Robinson, bin Laden came back from the Hajj a changed man.

He now prayed five times a day, something that he had not done since his early days in Lebanon...He rid himself of the symbol of his old life, his yellow Mercedes SL 450 convertible. His drinking friends were similarly dispatched from his life, with a sermon on their sins. (p. 81)

The Hajj had brought bin Laden back to the core of his deep religious beliefs. Bin Laden had never done anything half-heartedly. This time would prove no different. He immersed himself in Islam. The same zealous fervor with which he had embraced the wicked vices in Lebanon would bring him to the extreme margin of militant Islam. Given his immense wealth, charismatic nature, and newfound motivations, he would quickly become the most dangerous man

on earth. In 1979 bin Laden went to Afghanistan to take up the fight against the Soviet occupation. His experiences in Afghanistan would complete his transformation as the world's most wanted terrorist.

The Idealog: Ayman Al-Zawahiri

While Osama bin Laden is regarded as the charismatic inspirational leader of the Al Qaeda network, Egyptian physician Ayman al-Zawahiri is widely regarded to be the mastermind behind the organization and the director of most of the terror operations. Youssef H. Aboul-Enein's manuscript on Zawahiri provides a comprehensive record of his origin, background activities and motivation. As Aboul-Enein (2004) states:

Understanding Al-Zawahiri is to understand the most violent form of Islamic radicalism, one where there is no negotiation and an uncompromising attitude in waging an offensive jihad on those he has deemed as enemies of his brand of Islamic fundamentalism. (p. 1)

According to Aboul-Enein, Zawahiri was born in 1951 to a wealthy Egyptian family. His paternal grandfather was the Imam of the Al Azhar Mosque, while his maternal grandfather was the president of Cairo University and Ambassador to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen (Aboul-Enein, 2004). Zawahiri first became interested in Islamic fundamentalism during his senior year in high school. Following Abdul Nasser's brutal crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, and Egypt's humiliating defeat at the hands of United States backed Israeli forces in the 1967 Six-Day War, Zawahiri determined he would start his own Islamic group. Abdoul-Enein points out the fact that "the ideological zeal of youth combined with forming solid jihadist theories at an early age"

contributed heavily to Zawahiri's extremist position (p. 2). He formed the Tanzeem in 1966-67 with three other students (Aboul-Enein, 2004). This group would grow in size, scope and influence and would eventually become the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ). Zawahiri held a deep-seated hatred for the Egyptian regime and it served as the main focus of his Islamic Jihad movement. Zawahiri completed his medical degree in 1974 and spent time in an Egyptian prison for Islamic activities. He traveled to and from Afghanistan several times during the early to mid 1980s and finally went to stay in 1987 (Aboul-Enein, 2004).

The Mentor: Sheikh Abdullah Yusuf Azzam

Osama bin Laden is often given credit for establishing the Al Qaeda organization. However, Sheikh Abdullah Yusuf Azzam was the real marionette responsible for establishing the Mekhtab al-Khadamat (MAK) in Afghanistan which served as the precursor to Al Qaeda. Azzam and Bin Laden worked together in Afghanistan in the early 1980s and formed Al Qaeda "the base" to train and recruit Arab Mujahideen fighters for the war against the Soviets (Cordesman, A., & Obaid, N. 2005). Azzam was a Palestinian born in 1941 and much like Bin Laden and Zawahiri was well educated and deeply influenced by the Arab-Israeli conflict as well the desperate conditions of Muslims living in Syrian-occupied Lebanon. He attended Damascus University in Syria and Al-Azhar University in Egypt where he earned multiple degrees including a PhD in Islamic "Sharia" Law (Robinson, 2002). Azzam later taught at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia where he first met Osama Bin Laden (Aboul-Enein, 2002). Azzam from all accounts was a fiercely radical Islamist who participated in the Palestinian Jihad against Israel but quickly became upset with the secularism of the fighters (Kohlman, 2004). Although the specific

date is unknown, Azzam went to Peshawar, Afghanistan in the early 1980s to assist the mujahideen in their fight against the Soviet occupation. In Peshawar he would form the MAK. According to several accounts (e.g., Robinson, 2004; Anonymous, 2002; Kohlman, 2004), Azzam's objective for Al Qaeda differed significantly from Bin Laden's. Azzam felt the focus should be on creating an ideal Islamic state in Afghanistan first where Muslims from everywhere would come to train and join the mujahideen. Only once this was accomplished would the focus shift to exporting the jihad (Kohlmann, E. 2004). Bin Laden on the other hand was more eager and impatient. In 1989 not long after completing his final work "Al Qa'ida: Al Jihad", Azzam was assassinated with his two sons by a car bomb. Little is known about the perpetrators of the assassination but speculation is that it was Egyptian extremists looking to capitalize on Bin Laden's wealth and his eagerness to export the jihad as soon as possible (Kohlmann, A. 2004).

Al Qaeda's Organization Structure

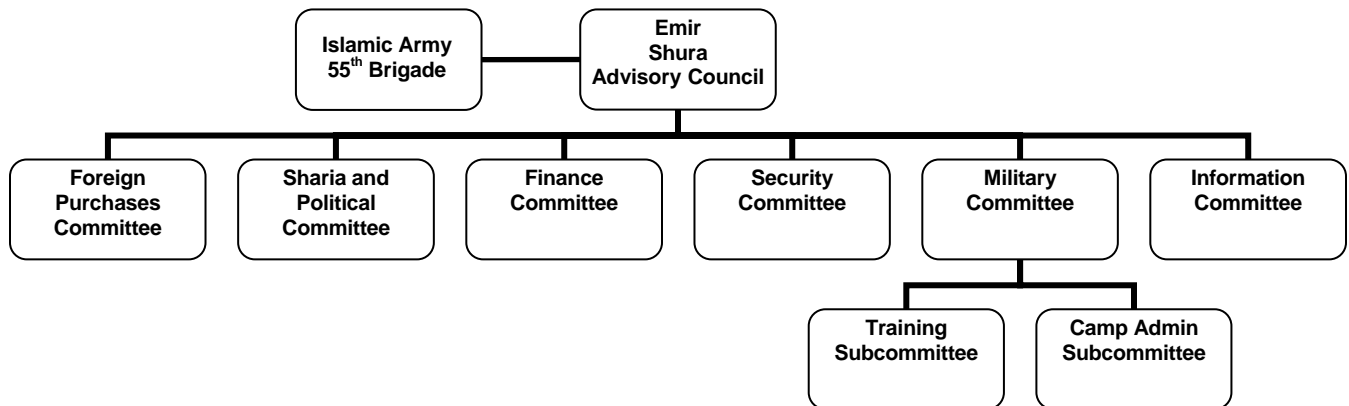


Figure 1. Organization Structure of Al Qaeda.

The Shura Council is made up of Bin Laden's closest associates. The Military Committee is responsible for selecting targets and supporting operations. The Security Committee is also responsible for intelligence and espionage. The Information Committee is responsible for propaganda. (Cordesman 2005, p. 3)

After the U.S. operations in Afghanistan against the Taliban regime and Al Qaeda, the organization lost much of its formal structure illustrated in Figure 1. Cordesman asserts that as key members were captured or killed and the remaining leadership forced to flee, the formality of the hierarchy went through a transformation. He describes the new structure as a "loosely-configured network based on individual cells dispersed throughout the world" (p. 3). U.S. administration officials repeatedly assert that two thirds of Al Qaeda's leadership and operational managers have been either captured or killed since September 11th. Indeed many have been, however, the

subsequent contention that the organization is no longer effective or capable is not necessarily the case. Richard Clarke, former Counter-Terror adviser to both the Clinton and Bush administrations, contends that this assertion fails to recognize two critical facts. The first is the fact that both Bin Laden and Zawahiri are still at large. The second is that Al Qaeda has replaced most if not all of the many of the managers who were killed or captured (Clarke, A., Aga, G., Cressey, R., Flynn, S., Mobley, B., Rosenbach, E., Simon, S., Wechsler, W., Wolosky, L., 2004). Opinions differ on just how functional Al Qaeda's leadership hierarchy remains, or the level to which it is intact. One thing is certain however, Bin Laden and Zawahiri are still very much in charge and Al Qaeda remains a threat.

Terrorist Rhetoric: Pay Attention to What They Say

Bin Laden has publicly outlined his military plans and intentions with precision. Despite the warfare that has now reached U.S. soil, most Americans still have paid little heed to his words

(Anonymous, p.4)

Understanding the background of Islamist extremist leaders gives us some perspective of their mindset and provides some insight as to what shapes their thought processes, beliefs, prejudices and desires. It does little however to indicate what they want or how they intend to act to achieve their objectives. In order to get a clear understanding of the global Islamist movement in general and Al Qaeda's desired end state in particular, and to gain an understanding of militant Islam's grand strategy, one needs only to pay close attention to their rhetoric.

An integral part of the Islamic extremists' strategy is propaganda. They rely heavily on the ability to influence and recruit through writings, speeches and electronic media. In particular, Bin Laden and Zawahiri have been prolific with speeches and writings over the past several years.

Most examples of extremist propaganda are intended for public consumption, targeted at both supporters and adversaries alike. Much of it could be categorized as repetitive, self-aggrandizing banter, or simply inflammatory rhetoric meant to incite emotional responses from the target audience. As is the case with most propaganda, much of the Islamic extremist material is pure rhetoric and of little or no analytical value. Some documents however, offer an insight into the goals, ways and means of Al Qaeda and its associated extremist network. Barry Rubin and Judith Colp Rubin, in their work, *Anti-American Terrorism and the Middle East: Understanding the Violence*, put together a comprehensive collection of translated writings and speeches by Islamic fundamental extremists. Perhaps the most amazing observation one can make by reading these transcripts is that although they were written over a span of sixty-plus years, and by a myriad of individuals from around the globe, they contain striking similarities with regard to objectives, purpose and means. The translations provide valuable insight from which to draw some significant and somewhat frightening conclusions.

Global Jihad and Regime Change

One of the first translations in Rubin's work illustrates the true nature and depth of the Islamic extremist movement. This extract from a letter written in 1942 by Iranian Islamist leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, indicates the scope and virulent nature of the problem:

Those who study jihad will understand why Islam wants to conquer the whole world. All the countries conquered by Islam or to be conquered in the future will be marked for everlasting salvation. For they shall live under [God's law]... Those who know nothing of Islam pretend that Islam counsels against war. Those [who

say this] are witless. Islam says: Kill all the unbelievers just as they would kill you all! ...Does all [this] mean that Islam is a religion that prevents men from waging war? I spit upon those foolish souls who make such a claim (Rubin, 2002, p. 29).

In this short piece, Khomeini speaks of the righteousness of living a life based on Islamic principles and why Islam is the only way to true justice. The letter also highlights a couple of key points. First is the clear declaration that the Islamic movement has global intentions. Some may argue the idea that the Islamic extremist movement lacked formality, structure or purpose in 1942. That may or may not have been true at the time. Most certainly it was less so than it is today. What is important to note though is that the stated desire for an Islamic state, void of non-Islamic influences, had global intent. Second, Khomeini highlights a common extremist interpretation of the Koran calling for the killing of all non-believers. Repeated often in writings and speeches by the likes of Yusuf Azzam, Ayman Al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden, this call for the murder of "infidels" is a common thread which permeates the movement's rhetoric over time. Also, since Khomeini made his comments in 1942 during the height of World War II, they present a bit of a quandary for those who might argue that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will have a significant impact on the problem of Al Qaeda and the global extremist movement.

Sayyid Qutb, an Islamic theorist wrote a letter in 1955 repeating the objective of the Islamic extremist jihad:

However, [the defense of the homeland] is not the ultimate objective of the Islamic movement of jihad, but it is a means of establishing the Divine authority within it so that it becomes the headquarters for the movement of Islam, which is then to be

carried throughout the earth to the whole of mankind, as the object of this religion is all humanity and its sphere of action is the whole earth (Rubin, 2002, p. 30).

Again, the movement's intent for global conquest is readily apparent. Qutb writes that the only righteous path is through complete submission and obedience to Islam and the only way to achieve a state which demands such submission and obedience is through violent jihad. This is another common Islamic extremist theme.

Most local Islamic extremist organizations are focused on overthrowing governments and their rhetoric leaves little doubt as to their intentions. One such group is the Egyptian Jama al-Islamiyya. Founded originally by Ayman Al Zawahiri, their stated purpose is to overthrow the Mubarak government and replace it with an Islamic theocracy. Rubin provides a translation of a text by Sheikh Rifa'ey Ahmad Taha which illustrates the nature of the group's intentions. "The Jama'a [al-Islamiyya group]...[aims] to establish an Islamic caliphate in accordance with prophetic guidance, and to seek the pleasure of Allah, the Lord of the worlds..." (p. 67). The Sheikh goes on to describe the failures of the Egyptian government, outlining economic, moral and political wrongs it has levied against Islam and why the injustices must be stopped. It is obvious by reading this particular text that it is meant as propaganda to incite malcontent among Egyptian society and discredit the actions of the Egyptian regime.

Aboul-Enien quotes Ayman Al Zawahiri regarding his vision for the role of jihad in the process of establishing an Islamic government. "[jihad is] the removal of the current government through revolution and bringing about an Islamic government in its place. This revolution can only come about through the use of force, and the cooperation of the military with civilians to bring about this goal" (p. 4). Here again, Zawahiri repeats two key issues for the Islamist movement

illustrated in Khomeini's and Qutb's writings earlier. The first is the necessity for violent jihad. The second is the requirement to replace non-Islamic regimes with Islamic governments. These are perhaps the two most enduring themes throughout Islamist writings and propaganda. In this particular message Zawahiri also points to the fact that in order to be successful, the jihadi effort must have the support of the people – including the military. This provides some insight into one of the key elements of the Islamic extremist strategy – building and maintaining the support base within the Muslim community. It also represents a vulnerability which could be leveraged in an effective counter-strategy.

The Enemy: America and Israel

Two well known examples of Islamic extremist movements which openly state their objectives are Hizballah and Hamas. In February 1985, Hizballah, the anti-Israeli extremist group whose name Hisb-Allah translates as “party of God”, published a charter of sorts which outlined their stated purpose and objectives. Rubin provides the following translation:

The United States has tried...to persuade the people that those who crushed their arrogance in Lebanon...were nothing but a bunch of fanatic terrorists whose sole aim is to dynamite bars and destroy slot machines...We combat abomination, and we shall tear out its very roots...which are the United States (p. 50).

The statement goes on to list Hizballah's main objectives: To expel the Americans and allies from Lebanon; to bring the Israelis to justice for their crimes against “Muslims and Christians”; and “to permit all the sons of our people to determine their future and to choose in all liberty the form of government they desire”... (p. 52). Hizballah leaves no question as to their

desired end state in Lebanon and it is obvious that the United States and Israel are the main focus of the organizations terrorist operations. As is the case with the call for violent jihad and overthrow of non-Islamic regimes illustrated earlier, this particular stance against the United States and Israel represents a common thread within the stated objectives of most Islamic movements.

We see in Israel the vanguard of the United States in our Islamic world. It is the hated enemy that must be fought until the hated ones get what they deserve... We vigorously condemn all plans for negotiation with Israel, and regard all negotiators as enemies...(Rubin, 2002, p. 53).

Here Hizballah establishes its final and perhaps overarching objective; the destruction of Israel. The message discusses specific grievances against Israel and declares its opposition to all of the Middle East peace agreements to date. The same objective was laid out by the Palestinian Hamas in their Charter in 1988. Speaking of "Palestine" in the grander sense and indirectly of Israel, Hamas establishes that the foundation of Israel was illegitimate and that no one has the authority to subvert Palestinian lands.

The Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the land of Palestine has been an Islamic waqf [foundation] throughout the generations and until the Day of Resurrection, no one can renounce it or part of it or abandon it or part of it... No Arab country nor the aggregate of all Arab countries, and no Arab king or president nor all of them in the aggregate, have that right (Rubin, 2004, p. 54).

As is the case with this illustration by Hamas and Hizballah, many Islamic radicals cite the relationship between the United States and Israel as being the center of all evil in the region as well as the primary source of the Muslim world's problems. Although Hamas and Hizballah are

considered “international” terrorist organizations, their efforts remain largely regional, focused almost entirely on Israel. Their expressed goals and grievances however reflect many of those from truly international terrorist organizations, such as Al Qaeda.

In August 1996, Osama bin Laden, acting under the moniker of the World Islamic Front, issued what has been referred to as a “Declaration of War” against the United States. At the time not many people, aside from Islamic extremists, government intelligence agencies and terrorist watch groups paid it much notice. The declaration leaves no ambiguity as to Al Qaeda’s purpose or intent. It takes only cursory study to clearly understand Bin Laden’s objections to U.S. policy.

Rubin quotes the declaration in its entirety but the main points are easily distilled. In it, Bin Laden outlines his grievances against the West (United States) and Israel. He lists “atrocities” carried out around the world against Muslims and builds a case against the United States, its allies and even the United Nations. “The latest and greatest of these aggressions, incurred by the Muslims...is the occupation of the Land of the Two Holy Places” (p. 137). Here Bin Laden is referring to the presence of U.S. and allied military forces in Saudi Arabia. This is a main source of Islamic fundamentalist friction with the United States which Bin Laden will refer to time and time again to focus the attention of the movement, gain support of the Muslim people, and justify his terrorist activities.

Bin Laden goes on to establish an argument that de-legitimizes the Saudi regime as a puppet of U.S. corruption. Finally he makes the declaration to fight against the United States and the “American-Israeli alliance”:

To push the enemy – the greatest kufr (non Muslim community) – out of the country is a prime duty. No other duty after Belief is more important than [this]

duty. Utmost effort should be made to prepare and instigate the umma against the enemy, the American-Israeli alliance – occupying the country...the occupying American enemy is the principal and the main cause of the situation. Therefore efforts should be concentrated on destroying, fighting, and killing the enemy... (p. 139).

Bin Laden closes by appealing to the Muslim masses for support to the fighters of the “crusaders” and stating that “This is the time of hardship so be tough” (Rubin, 2002, p. 142).

Bin Laden would repeat his message of jihad against the United States with the “Fatwa for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders” issued by the World Islamic Front on February 23rd 1998. The fatwa was in essence a call to arms and restatement of his 1996 declaration of war. It was signed by several Islamist senior leaders including Bin Laden, Ayman Al Zawahiri, Abu-Yasir Rifa’I, Ahmad Taha, Sheikh Mir Hamzah and Fazlul Rahman. (Rubin, 2002) These individuals represent the main thrust of Islamic movements in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The statement is very direct in nature and outlines the grievances and of Al Qaeda’s international terrorist operations. In particular the fatwa lists three specific grievances against the United States’ conduct and policies in the Middle East.

For over seven years the United States has been occupying the lands of Islam...plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and tuning its bases...into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples. ...the American’s continuing aggression towards the Iraqi people using the peninsula as a staging post...the Americans are once again trying to repeat the horrific massacres...So now they come to annihilate

what is left of this people and to humiliate their Muslim neighbors... Third, if the Americans' aims behind these wars are religious and economic, the aim is also to serve the Jews' petty state and divert attention from its occupation of Jerusalem and murder of Muslims there. The best proof of this is their eagerness to destroy Iraq...and to fragment all the states of the region...to guarantee Israel's survival... (World Islamic Front, 1998, p. 2).

Again, clearly America's strong military presence in the Arabian Peninsula, and in particular Saudi Arabia, is the main focus of Al Qaeda's discontent. The military buildup in the region following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and virtual permanent presence since Operation DESERT STORM is often stated as a cause of Muslim resentment of U.S. policy in the Middle East. Bin Laden views this as a means to continue what he sees as a systematic U.S. campaign to plunder Arab wealth and oppress the Muslim people. Additionally, at the time of the fatwa, ongoing Operations NORTHERN and SOUTHERN WATCH and continuing economic sanctions against Saddam Hussein's regime further added to the deep resentment. The military operations in Bin Laden's view were part of the U.S. anti-Muslim conspiracy with Israel, as was the U.S. support for the decades old conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

This is not the first time these grievances had been openly cited. They had been stated previously alone or together in various forms. This was the first time however they were attached to a fatwa calling for the killing of all Americans wherever they were. From this point forward, these three themes serve as a rallying cry to focus Arab and Muslim attention on U.S. policies in the region, foment anti-American sentiment as a means to spur Al Qaeda recruiting and a means to

justify terrorist activities. The fatwa, which basically equates to a restatement of his declaration of war, specifically establishes that it is permissible to kill all Americans:

On that basis, and in compliance with God's order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims. ...to kill the Americans and their allies - civilian and military - is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible [in order to liberate the region]. We call on every Muslim...to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. ...launch the raid on Satan's U.S. troops and the devil's supporters allying with them (World Islamic Front, 1998, p. 2).

Here, Al Qaeda establishes a broad target set for attacks by militant extremists. Americans are clearly the focus but the statement calls on all Muslims to kill Americans and their allies wherever and whenever they possibly can. The statement also targets the U.S. military forces as "Satan's troops" who should be attacked so that they may "learn a lesson". (World Islamic Front, 1998) One more important and interesting note regarding this particular fatwa is the focus on the role Islam plays in the rhetoric. The fatwa calls on all Muslims to take action. It establishes a necessity and a requirement for all Muslims to act "in compliance with God's order" and take up arms against America and its allies. This again points to Al Qaeda's effort to focus discontent against America and to recruit supporters. By calling on all Muslims and stating that it is a duty to take action, Bin Laden is making the case that if you are a Muslim who does not support the effort, then you are not a true Muslim and you are not following God's orders. Bin Laden reinforces his message by repeatedly citing the Koran in an effort to justify the call to arms.

Anyone who reads just the handful of documents cited above should be dumfounded by the general extent to which some claim to not know what Al Qaeda's aims or objectives are. The main themes are obvious. Bin Laden views the U.S. policies and military operations in the Muslim world as an attack on Islam itself and thus he is taking action against America to defend all Muslims against U.S. attacks. He is making this argument in a clearly articulated manner that from the perspectives of ordinary Muslims living in the Middle East is quite frankly easy to believe. Bin Laden's argument is definitely skewed by his perceptions of U.S. actions. However, his portrayal of the America's conduct as an anti-Muslim conspiracy is at the very least plausible to the ordinary Muslim observer. "Bin Laden's indictment is pretty much factual, ... All of the conflicts noted have occurred or are in progress – and, more important, his portrayal of them as attacks on Islam and Muslims are completely plausible to Muslims worldwide" (Anonymous, 2004, p. 130). Contrary to the general belief expressed by many so-called "experts" in the United States, Al Qaeda does not hate us for who we are or the freedoms we enjoy as Americans. Nor do they hate us for the wealth we have. On the contrary, they hate us for what we do, particularly in the Middle East and especially for our blind support to all of Israel's actions regardless of brutality against the Palestinian people.

This argument is not meant as an effort to justify Al Qaeda's actions nor is it an indictment of U.S. policy in the region. It is meant as a framework for understanding. It is meant as a way to view the issue from the enemy's perspective and a way to answer the "whys" of the questions of the global Islamic radical movement. Certainly America's policies are not the only reason the United States and its allies are singled out for terrorist activities. It is however the underlying issue Al Qaeda uses to justify its actions. Is it a façade implemented to hide Al Qaeda's true intention –

the push for a pan-Arab Caliphate? Perhaps it is. However, we cannot forget that American economic, military and political power represents the single greatest impediment to Al Qaeda being able to achieve its stated objective of regime change in targeted Arab nations.

Understanding the basis of Al Qaeda's arguments, which it so effectively uses to justify its actions, is essential to developing a cohesive counter-strategy.

To make the argument that the terrorists are simply a bunch of crazed lunatics bent on rampant, senseless destruction illustrates a severe lack of understanding of the problem. Simply paying attention to what they write and what they say provides ample insight into their motivations and desires. It is exceedingly apparent that we are facing a well educated, committed and adaptive adversary, motivated by a deep sense of conviction and the utmost belief in the righteousness of their cause. The objectives are clear. But what of the means to achieve their desired ends?

Terror Attacks and Outcomes: Watching What They Do

Defining "Terror"

Webster's defines terror as "a state of intense fear" and terrorism as "the systematic use of terror as a means of coercion" (Merriam-Webster's, 2003., p. 1290). I propose for the sake of argument that fear alone regardless of its degree is simply fear. *Terror* however is a cognitive state of emotion which is comprised of two components; a level of extreme fear and the feeling of complete helplessness. Both components are necessary to instill terror. Semantics? Perhaps. But it is an important distinction to make in order to clearly understand the means employed by terrorists to achieve their objectives. One key characteristic of terrorist attacks which makes them so effective is not necessarily the fear they cause but the accompanying feeling of helplessness to

do anything about them. It is this sense of helplessness the terrorists rely on to shake the foundations of societies and undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the governments they target. This is also where the terrorist propaganda can be leveraged for additional effect. Once attacks have been carried out successfully, threats themselves become terror weapons.

Terrorist attacks in general are not random acts of wonton destruction as some have speculated. For the most part they are calculated and planned attacks against specific targets and meant to achieve a specific objective to support the movement's overall strategy. The targets in some regard could be considered analogous to decisive points along a line of operation in a campaign. Some attacks may seem random in nature when in fact the randomness may well be part of the plan to instill terror within the society – again leveraging the helplessness variable.

Al Qaeda's attacks tend to be large scale and spectacular in nature usually against targets of symbolic significance. The rationale is to not only create the greatest destruction and disruption but to garner maximum media coverage and thus create the greatest psychological impact. These types of attacks require extensive preparation. Several examples illustrate this point.

Prior to the dramatic attacks of September 11th, 2001 on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Al Qaeda focused most of its attacks on specific targets directly related to their first stated objective; to remove the U.S. military presence from Saudi Arabia. The bombing of the Khobar Towers housing complex in Dhahran Saudi Arabia in 1996 is a prime example. At the time, Dhahran was a major base of operations for the U.S. Air Force in the Kingdom. Al Qaeda selected Dhahran AB because of that very fact but the targeting was more specific and directly related to their objective.

They could have attacked the headquarters building or the flight line or any other facility on the base, but instead they chose the housing complex. The intent was to create as many casualties as possible in an attempt to drive the American military out of the country. Bin Laden knew from precedent that America had little stomach for images of dead and injured servicemen being carried from the wreckage of bombed out buildings being played out on CNN. America had clearly demonstrated the lack of resolve in the face of casualties in the past. When terrorists drove a truck bomb through the guard post at the Marine barracks compound in Beirut in 1983 and killed 241 Marines, America responded by pulling the troops out of Lebanon. In Somalia in 1993 Task Force Ranger lost 18 soldiers in the now famous ill-fated “Black Hawk Down” raid on the Olympia hotel in Mogadishu. The intolerable images of a battered Michael Durant and the body of a U.S. soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu drove the Clinton administration to order a near immediate withdrawal of forces from Somalia – the mission left incomplete. The response to the Khobar towers attack would be nearly the same. Within weeks the United States shut down the entire operation and moved it to Al Kharj and Prince Sultan Air Base in remote central Saudi Arabia. This time, America would continue the mission but the overall effect was much the same. The hasty withdrawal from unfinished missions in Lebanon and Somalia and the retreat from Dhahran sent a message to Al Qaeda – a crystal clear message which they would undoubtedly act on sooner or later.

Putting the Pieces Together: Pillars of Al Qaeda's Strategy

“Thus, what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy”

(Sun Tzu)

To What End

Today we are faced with a global Islamic extremist insurrection. That is it, nothing more, nothing less. That statement is in no way intended to imply simplicity with regard to how we should view or address the problem. Nor is it intended to underestimate the effort it will take to defeat it. On the contrary, analyzing the problem of Islamic extremism through the lens of an insurrection quickly brings you to the conclusion that the effort involved in bringing it under control, eliminating the root causes, and defeating the hard core extremist leadership will be nothing short of colossal. Calling it a "global insurgency" is merely a descriptive way of encapsulating the very nature of the phenomenon that is the international Islamic extremist movement.

When examining Al Qaeda and its associated terror networks from this perspective, it becomes readily apparent that all of the classic elements of an insurgency are in place. The terrorists make up the insurgents who are fighting a guerilla style war against governments they deem as oppressive. From the terrorists' point of view, the current regimes (especially U.S.-Western friendly governments) are attacking Muslim traditions and beliefs through their anti-Islamic policies and practices. In general, the terrorist groups share the common goal of replacing these current governments with Islamic theocracies. Finally the terrorists follow the common extremist ideology, feeding on the Muslim populations' disillusionment, misgivings and frustration with current governmental practices in order to garner both direct and indirect support for their efforts.

This particular insurrection however is being executed on two distinct yet interconnected levels. In effect it is being conducted as a network of insurrections within an insurrection. While

local/regional entities work the tactical details of nation-specific efforts, Al Qaeda carries out the majority of its efforts at the higher strategic level. This is important to understand since without Al Qaeda the overall effort would be nothing more than a series of disassociated terrorist movements with a somewhat similar objective as an end state. Al Qaeda's efforts are focused on building the global insurrection against the "United States and the West." With Bin Laden providing the charismatic leadership for the cause, Al Qaeda contributes to the global effort by; supporting the elemental uprisings; inspiring followers by spreading the extremist ideology; and executing direct attack missions on key strategic targets.

Much has been written about Al Qaeda's desire to establish a global Islamic entity or "caliphate". Whether the desired end state is an Islamic utopian "Global Caliphate" as some may argue, or merely a loose amalgamation of extremist Islamic regimes run under the strict adherence to Sharia law is quite frankly irrelevant. The form Al Qaeda's desired end state takes may help illustrate the potential threat or help scope the problem but it does little to define it. The negative implications of a successful campaign on the part of the extremists for the United States, its allies and the rest of the free world cannot be overstated. However, they remain the same regardless of how in particular you define the end state. Scoping the problem through the lens of a global insurgency provides a framework to understand or examine how local problems may be interrelated with others on a regional or international level. Of particular significance is that this global insurrection, due to its very nature, in many ways, lacks definition.

What Americans may see as a clearly defined act of "terrorism" may not be seen as such elsewhere. In fact, depending on the local cultural, political or economic environs, what Americans call a terrorist attack may be seen as clearly righteous, justified and legitimate from

another government's perspective. There is no international standard for the definition of terrorism. The U.S. State Department's annual publication *Patterns of Global Terrorism* lists the following definition. "...premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience" (U.S. State Department, 2003, p. xii). The old adage "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" is generally the rule rather than the exception among governments around the world. It depends on perspective. From the Russian perspective, Chechen rebels are clearly terrorists, while from the Chechen perspective they are heroes fighting for independence from Russian oppression – much like the United States supported Mujahideen in Afghanistan in the 1980s. All but the most calloused supporters of violent movements around the world would assert that violent attacks directed at innocent women and children should be categorized as terrorist acts. But the argument becomes blurred when the attacks are directed at opposition governmental institutions or military forces and the civilian casualties are incidental or collateral.

Americans tend to generalize terms such as "Radical Islam," "Islamist," "Extremist" or "Terrorist," and use them interchangeably at will. This is not the case everywhere and it is especially not the case in the predominantly Muslim countries. In Kuwait for instance, there is a clear distinction between the terms "Islamic Radical," "Islamic Extremist" and "Terrorist." An Islamic radical is one who publicly espouses support for insurgent or terrorist behavior or who provides support through funding. An extremist is defined as someone who publicly encourages direct participation in violence by the masses against the state. These are usually zealot religious leaders utilizing their position of authority in the church to spread extremist behavior. A terrorist is defined as someone who actually carries out a physically violent act.

Finally, the motivations, intentions and even forms the Islamic movements around the world take are as diverse and numerous as the movements themselves. This further exacerbates the problem by complicating the solution. Their support activities also take on a myriad of forms, often employing legitimate economic and financial business practices. What makes a counter-terror effort in one region successful may not work when applied in another, or may actually make it worse.

The social, economic and political implications of a growing international Islamic terrorist insurgency are staggering. Defeating it will take a focused application of a clearly defined strategy and will involve all elements of national power. The military will play an important role fighting against terrorists and their organizations, however any comprehensive strategy to address the problem of international terrorism needs to address all of the underlying causes and employ non-kinetic solutions. Most of which do not reside within the military's sphere of influence. Our first order of business in developing such a strategy must be to examine and clearly comprehend our adversary's strategic approach to obtaining its objectives. Only then will we be able to formulate a coherent response.

Al Qaeda's Strategic Framework: A Three Tiered Approach

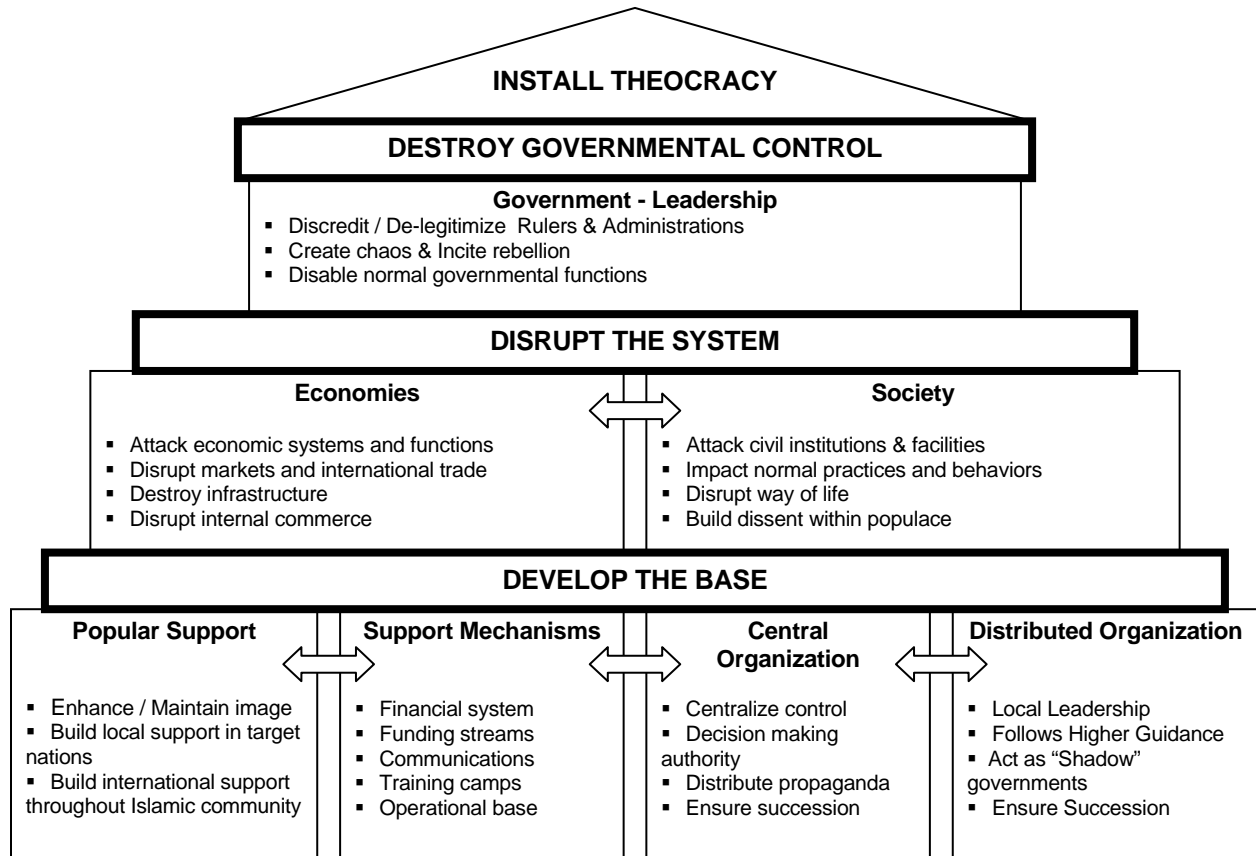


Figure 2. Al Qaeda's Strategic Framework. Arrows illustrate mutually supporting efforts.

Knowingly or not, it appears Al Qaeda is utilizing a loosely structured global extremist network in conjunction with its association with local and regional Islamic movements to execute a fairly well defined global strategy. "Knowingly or not" is demonstrative in that, to some extent this appears to be the case. If one pays attention to the Islamic extremist rhetoric discussed earlier, it is somewhat easy to argue that this strategic framework is the result of purposeful design. However, one could also argue that the coordination required to formulate and execute such a wide ranging strategy would be exceedingly difficult given the diverse nature of the movement and wide

span of influence necessary. Effectively coordinating a coherent strategic effort across the varied landscape of Islamic terror networks in existence around the world today would be problematic at best. But, given Al Qaeda's significant resources coupled with the capabilities presented by inexpensive, modern communication equipment and the internet it is not inconceivable.

Additionally, the strategy takes advantage of the extremist movements' ideological underpinnings resident within the fastest spreading religion on the planet. This provides a self-propagating base from which Al Qaeda can leverage its extremist rhetoric to build support. In this regard, execution of the strategy may require less direct coordination than expected. This presents the potential for the strategy to be exceedingly successful despite the constraints posed by the scale of effort and physical distances involved.

The strategy is comprised of three main tiers of effort. Each tier contains specific and mutually supportive lines of operation. The first is the development of the organization and expansion of the ideological base of the Islamist movement. The second is the planning and execution of operations designed to disrupt civil society and the economic power of target nations. The third is destroying governmental control and degrading the legitimacy of the governments of target states. The capstone would be the final stage of overthrowing the government in place and installing the desired theocracy. Terrorist activities within each tier are often complimentary in nature and can be executed both sequentially and simultaneously. As stated earlier, terrorist attacks are rarely random acts of violence. This model provides a framework to understand how specific terrorist activities impact efforts along the lines of operation and affect the overall effort of the movement.

Develop the Base

The foundation of the strategy rests in Al Qaeda's ability to develop and sustain the militant global Islamic movement as a whole. This particular tier of the strategy is the most complex and involves a broad array of efforts focused on the development of four main areas: Popular Support; Support Mechanisms; Centralized Control; and Distributed Organizations. This has been the underlying main effort of Bin Laden and the Al Qaeda organization as a whole since its inception. Efforts along this line include everything from developing extremist propaganda and building terrorist training camps to developing communication capabilities and illicit financing networks.

Popular Support

Al Qaeda's propaganda machine is extremely adroit at feeding off of resident anti-American and anti-western sentiment while manipulating information to support its efforts. This is especially the case in the main target areas of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the Arabian Gulf. Repeatedly portraying the United States and its allies as the root cause of problems in these regions and focusing on disaffected youth has proven to be not only an effective marketing ploy but also a fruitful recruiting tool. Al Qaeda enhances its propaganda effort by consistently justifying and vehemently touting successful terrorist attacks to further enhance their image as a defender of Muslims and to portray the United States and its allies as weak and vulnerable. Developing this supporting base of extremist ideology and expanding the pool of potential terrorists who are ready and willing to pick up the fight is crucial to the long term effectiveness of not only the Al Qaeda

organization but the Islamic fundamentalist movement as a whole. It also points to a vulnerability which could and should be targeted by counter terror efforts.

Support Mechanisms

Estimates of Bin Laden's personal net worth run from a low of \$30M to over \$1B. (Anonymous, 2002; Robinson, 2004) Prior to U.S. efforts to freeze terrorist assets and shut down the flow of funds following the September 11th attacks, Bin Laden was able to personally finance many of Al Qaeda's operations and expansion efforts on his own. Since 9-11, many of his assets have been seized and traditional funding streams significantly constrained. However, Al Qaeda maintains relatively strong support from sympathizers throughout the Muslim community and the flow of money in the form of donations has far from stopped. Additionally, the common misconception that Al Qaeda requires a large amount of capital to operate is unfounded. By all estimates, the sum total cost of funding the Sept 11th attacks was about \$500,000. Al Qaeda has built a strong base of support from which it can draw voluntary contributions through mosques, Islamic charities and Islamic NGOs. Al Qaeda also maintains lucrative ties with narcotics traffickers in Asia and South America which provide potentially millions of dollars. Finally, Al Qaeda has proven very adaptive and savvy in its use of modern communications equipment to maintain contact between it and its branch networks. The nature of such an innovative and adaptive support capability will prove to be difficult to interrupt.

Central Organization

Al Qaeda's central organization plays a critical role in the development and operation of the global insurrection. As illustrated in Figure 1, Al Qaeda's central organization or network acts

as the focal point for normal functions typically associated with any centralized control structure. The Advisory council provides the leadership while the committees carry out the ongoing operations of the organization. This central organization maintains the lions' share of responsibility for developing financial support processes, raising and distributing funds, developing and distributing propaganda, recruiting members and conducting attack planning. It also acts as the theocratic base for the movement, developing the ideology, raising public awareness of the cause and, in Osama bin Laden, providing the corpus mystique or *Robin Hood-esque* heroic figure for the masses. The ability of this central organization to function in adverse conditions and maintain succession as members are killed or captured is critical to the overall success of insurrection.

Distributed Organization

What the Strategic Framework in Figure 2 refers to as the "Distributed Organization" is the network of Al Qaeda affiliated fundamentalist organizations around the world. These organizations maintain a local or regional focus to their operations but receive support in the form of funding, weapons, planning and direction from the central organization. Al Qaeda has undertaken a serious effort, albeit not entirely coherent or successful, to encourage and assist the development of these branch organizations to carry on the jihad locally under the moniker of the global effort. The intent here is to take a piecemeal approach to obtaining the global objectives by directly leveraging local and regional successes. This hub-and-spoke methodology allows the central organization to remain focused on the strategic first tier efforts while utilizing local organizations to execute tactically. Although there is plenty of evidence to suggest the direct

association between Al Qaeda and certain regional terror groups such as Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Philippines, Jama'a al-Islamiyya (JAI) in Egypt and the Islamic Movement in Uzbekistan (IMU), connections to these organizations are perhaps more ethereal in nature than formal. There is however clear intent in the effort.

Some argue that these organizations will become more robust over time and are intended to be the first step in the process toward establishing Islamic theocracies once the regimes in place in the target countries are removed. Given the overall intent and clearly stated main objectives of the global insurrection, it is not a far stretch to assert that these affiliated organizations are intended to eventually act as pre-ordained shadow governments poised to step into any eventual leadership void. Al Qaeda's ability to execute such an approach becomes increasingly questionable given the immense pressure posed by continued relentless military operations being carried out to track down Bin Laden and his lieutenants. However, though the plan may be questionable now, if the growth of these splinter movements remained unchecked it is not beyond reason that it could come to fruition.

Disrupt the System

The second tier of Al Qaeda's strategy is disruption. Again, many of the efforts, primarily terrorist attacks, in this tier are mutually supportive of efforts in other areas. As stated earlier, terrorist attacks, for the most part, are not random acts of violence. They are not conducted without specific carefully targeted intent. Terrorist attacks are primarily targeted at economic or social centers of gravity; with the intent being to disrupt commerce and societal processes and discredit the government in the process.

Economies

Economics is the life blood of modern society. Terrorism presents a multi-dimensional threat to that lifeblood. Every prosperous nation state draws its political power and influence principally from its economic engine. This is certainly the fact in the western world. Terrorist attacks on economic centers of gravity are meant to disrupt internal commerce, destroy infrastructure and disrupt international trade, in an effort to weaken the economic engine of a nation. In doing so, the terrorists can weaken governmental control of economic processes, reduce state revenues and thus degrade the government's power. It is obvious that the attacks on the World Trade Center Towers on September 11th were intended not only for spectacle but to deliver a decisive economic blow to the United States. There are other ways terrorism affects economies. By forcing governments to dedicate resources to counter terrorist actions, the extremists siphon capital away from other programs. Osama bin Laden alluded to this principle in his speech to the American people on November 1, 2004. In it, he states: "the Mujahideen bled the Russians for ten years, until it went bankrupt and was forced to withdraw in defeat...so we are continuing the policy of bleeding America to the point of bankruptcy..."(Bin Laden, 2004, p. 3.). He goes on to talk about the economic impact of September 11, stating that "Al Qaeda spent \$500,000 on the event, while America, in the incident and its aftermath, lost...more than \$500 Billion" (p. 4). He refers to his plan for the fight against America as a "bleed-until-bankruptcy plan".

Society

Terrorism also has a deep impact on societal norms. Al Qaeda's efforts in this area are focused on disrupting societal functions. Transportation, civil institutions, security and social

practices all fall within the realm of potential targets. The intent here is to create chaos and interrupt normal behavior patterns by forcing change in the basic conduct of lives. Terror causes dissent within the populace and again discredits the government by demonstrating its inability to control the situation. It is also worth mentioning here that earlier Al Qaeda attacks against U.S. military targets in the Arabian Gulf region, although targeted at military forces, were indirectly targeted at the perceptions and psyche of the American people. They were as much attacks on American society as they were on the military. The intent was to create a social impact and build enough of an uproar over casualties that the government would be forced to pull the troops out. Another example is the Madrid train station attack of March 11, 2004 which targeted the psyche of the Spanish people with the intent of influencing the upcoming election. The objective here was to shake the solidarity of the coalition in Iraq.

In April 2002, Al Qaeda released a statement which carries with it potentially grave consequences for civil societies in targeted countries. In the face of widespread outrage at the slaughter of innocent people on September 11th, Al Qaeda issued the statement to justify the attacks. In it, Al Qaeda asserts for the first time that the “prohibition against the blood of women, children, and the elderly is not an absolute prohibition” (Al Qaeda, 2002, p. 3). The statement outlines specific criteria where it is permissible to kill innocent people. Specifically it states that there are at least seven situations where it is permissible to kill “protected ones” and that only one of the conditions must be met. (Al Qaeda, 2002, p. 4). In an absolute sense this matters little from the perspective of the overall problem of terrorist attacks. Innocent civilians are often killed as a second order effect of terrorist attacks regardless of the target. However, from a practical standpoint, and looking at Al Qaeda's actions from the broader perspective, this represents a

significant doctrinal shift. It marks the general acceptance of the notion that killing civilians on a large scale is permissible and supported on religious, moral and legal grounds. As a more troubling note, it also increases the potential and likelihood of terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda using weapons of mass destruction against large population centers.

Destroy Governmental Control

The destruction of governmental control and subsequent dissolution of its legitimacy is the primary objective of the Al Qaeda strategy. As stated earlier, discrediting the government in place and gaining strong support from the people is the equation for success. The attacks on the economic engine and societal functions coupled with a strong propaganda campaign set the stage for the removal of the regime. They serve as a stepping stone of sorts to the next tier of the strategy...destroying governmental control. We have not seen the insurgency move to this point as of yet but the rhetoric supports the assertion. This would be the final step leading to regime change.

Targets in this area are intended to build on the disruption of lifestyles and incite unrest against the government. The propaganda campaign will focus the anger not on the attacks themselves but on the government's "injustices" against the people. They also demonstrate the government's impotence to action. The terror factor plays a large role in this tier of operations and in particular the helplessness factor leverages the discontent of the people.

[The extremists' commitment] to organize a movement with a new leadership after removing the present jahili leadership, and its efforts to create a distinct and permanent community based on divine authority and submission to the One God,

are sufficient cause for [the non Islamic community] to rise against it... (Rubin, 2002, p. 32)

The three tier model offers a structured way to look at the problem of the global Islamic insurgency. By breaking down the objectives and looking at their strategy as a time-phased and stepped approach to achieving those objectives we can get a clearer picture of the task we face. It can also help us understand how to approach the problem and devise an effective counter-strategy.

Evaluating U.S. Counter Strategy

Early Strategy and Recommended Action

Pre-9/11 Strategic Construct

On January 25th 2001, Richard Clarke sent a letter to then National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice asking for a National Security Council review of a proposed strategy for combating the threat to the United States. posed by Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda organization. (Clarke, R. Memo to NSA Rice, January 25, 2001) The memo references a strategic approach to the Al Qaeda problem which was started by Clinton Administration but required, in Clarke's opinion, some significant changes and decisions with regard to the focus of the effort and resourcing.

In the memo Clarke states that Al Qaeda's two main goals are to "drive the U.S. out of the Muslim world" and to "replace moderate...regimes in Muslim countries with theocracies modeled along the lines of the Taliban" (Clarke January 25th memo). He recommends the National Security Council Principals review and address four specific issues regarding Al Qaeda and provide strategic guidance regarding the new administration's policy. First, what is the accepted policy with regard to the level of the threat Al Qaeda poses to U.S. interests? Second, in what way should the strategy be modified to meet the Administration's goals? Third, should funding increases to counter the threat be continued. And Fourth, should the United States fund the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan and the government of Uzbekistan for the purpose of countering Al Qaeda.

It is apparent that Mr. Clarke had a relatively clear understanding of the overall threat Bin Laden's organization posed to U.S. interests at the time. He established Al Qaeda's objectives in an unequivocal manner and lays out a fairly convincing case for the new administration to implement a coherent strategy to deal with the threat. The proposed "strategy" however fell far short of being a comprehensive approach to dealing with the problem.

The Strategy for Eliminating the Threat from the Jihadist Networks of Al Qaeda set in place measures to counter or "Roll Back" the Al Qaeda network. (Clarke, R., 2000) The measures outlined in the strategy were aimed almost entirely at the Al Qaeda organization itself and said little about the overall global problem. It did however address the important role Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the Taliban in Afghanistan would play in any U.S. counter-terror effort. Its four main objectives were: (1) eliminate training camp facilities and infrastructure (primarily in Afghanistan); (2) seize funds and disrupt finances and support groups; (3) destroy active terror cells capable of launching terrorist attacks and (4) address the large numbers of personnel "willing to risk being identified as Al Qaeda members." (Clarke, 2000, p. 5.) The fourth objective referred to Al Qaeda's ability to generate a tide of willing terrorists to take up arms in support of the movement.

What this particular approach missed is the main pillar of Al Qaeda's execution strategy; its support base. In effect, the strategy focused almost entirely on the terrorists. It focused little effort on terrorism, the insurgency support base or the root causes of the Islamic extremist movement itself. While it established a skeletal framework for policies and the eventual formulation of strategy that would come after the September 11th attacks, the document as a whole

again fell short of what could be reasonably considered as a strategy to deal with a significant and deadly threat.

Clarke's Al Qaeda strategy was just the latest in a litany of generally ineffective policies or "strategies" to counter the threat of international terrorism. Most anti-terror efforts had been directed through decision memorandums and National Security Decision Directives (NSDDs).

In 1982, President Ronald Reagan issued NSDD 30 which stated "The U.S. is committed, as a matter of national policy, to oppose terrorism domestically and internationally" (White House, 1982, p. 1). The NSDD renounced terrorism and state sponsors of terrorism but stopped short of taking action other than establishing responsibilities in the event of a terrorist incident.

In July 1985 the White House issued NSDD 179, "Task Force on Combating Terrorism," which established a Vice Presidential executive task force to evaluate U.S. policy and programs on combating terrorism. The Task Force's main effort would again maintain an internal focus repeating most of the objectives established in NSDD 30. In addition, NSDD 179 directed an evaluation of current levels of international cooperation against terrorism. On January 20, 1986, the White House issued NSDD 207 which summarized the findings of the Vice Presidential Task Force and reaffirmed U.S. policy. In the NSDD, the President stated: "I have reviewed the Task Force Report and accompanying recommendations and conclude that our strategy is sound" (White House, 1986, p. 1). Once again however, the actions directed in NSDD 207 were aligned almost entirely on issues internal to the U.S. government and focused on incident response. Obviously the threat from international terrorism at the time came primarily from rogue organizations with specific local objectives. The majority of incidents involved occasional bombings and hijackings. The Administration believed the biggest threat came in the form of state sponsors and that by

utilizing traditional means of diplomatic and economic pressure they could be deterred. Given the fact that the specter of an international terrorist insurgency had not raised its head to a point of prominence as of yet, one could argue that the policies and strategy in place at the time were appropriate given the situation.

It is the policy of the United States to deter, defeat and respond vigorously to all terrorist attacks on our territory and against our citizens...The United States regards all such terrorism as a potential threat to national security as well as a criminal act and will apply all appropriate means to combat it (Clinton, W., 1995, p. 1).

This statement, taken from the U.S. Policy on Counterterrorism, issued on June 21, 1995, summarizes the position the Clinton Administration maintained throughout the late 1990s. International terrorism had taken on a new dimension with the rise of Al Qaeda and increase in international terrorist incidents. In this policy memorandum, President Clinton ordered several steps taken in four key areas: (1) Reduce U.S. vulnerability (2) Deter terror attacks (3) Respond to terrorist attacks and (4) Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Some key elements of the document remain classified and thereby inappropriate to address in this format; however the general intent and focus are clear.

This strategy provides only a marginal improvement over earlier counter-terror strategies and retains a predominantly internal focus. For example, with regard to the first key area of reducing U.S. vulnerability, the strategy lists eight key tasks, five of which are directed toward facility improvements to reduce the threat to citizens working in those facilities. When addressing intelligence efforts, a main line of operation for any cohesive strategy, the memorandum says the following of the Federal Bureau of Investigation: "The Director, FBI, as head of the investigative

agency for terrorism, shall reduce vulnerabilities by an expanded program of counterterrorism” (Clinton, 1995, p. 2). Perhaps the most significant shortcoming of this particular directive is its lack of specific direction with regard to the focus of the effort.

Given the global strategic environment in place in 1995 and the front page headline actions of terrorist entities around the world, the Clinton Administration's 1995 counter-terror strategy should have been vastly more congruent. The United States knew much more about Al Qaeda and the global nature of the terrorist nemesis in 1995 than it did in the late 1980s. This strategy was ambiguous, internally oriented, directed at administrative functions, and again focused almost entirely on the *terrorists*, not international *terrorism* or its root causes. In addition the memorandum directs that the U.S. government agencies involved “shall bear the costs of their participation, unless otherwise directed by me.” (Clinton, 1995, p. 9). In other words it was also unfunded. Any efforts the agencies took along the lines of what was directed in the memorandum would have to come out of already stretched budgets. What this strategy lacked in cohesion it more than made up for in its lack of forethought and resolve by relying on deterrence as key tenet for effectiveness. The very idea that a terror organization, with global capability bent on overthrowing national governments, could be deterred highlights a severe lack of comprehension of the threat on the part of the administration. Yet, this was the policy which remained in place, with only minor substantive changes, throughout the late 1990s.

U.S. National Security Strategy -- A Stroke of Genius or Dangerous Path?

Our Nation's cause has always been larger than our Nation's defense. We fight, as we always fight, for a just peace – a peace that favors liberty. We will defend the

peace against the threats from terrorists and tyrants. We will preserve the peace by building good relations among the great powers. And we will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent. (White House, 2002, p. 1)

President Bush's preamble to the 2002 National Security Strategy set the course for a tectonic shift in America's approach to securing its vital national interests and protecting its citizens around the globe. Unlike previous NSS documents, the 2002 NSS is direct, precise and unambiguous in its assertions of how America will use its national power and about the course the nation will take with regard to national security in the future. It is littered with phrases such as: "the U.S. must defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people" and "America must stand firmly for the nonnegotiable demands of human dignity". Of particular interest is that it emphasizes American values of human rights, freedom and liberty and a vision for the future, rather than a grocery list of categorized "interests". It could be considered somewhat grandiose with regard to the goals it establishes and methods it details to achieve them yet it leaves no doubt as to America's willingness to leverage its values to pursue its goals.

The 2002 NSS addresses the problem of international terrorism from a much broader perspective than previous NSSs. In particular it acknowledges the global scale of the problem and establishes some specific actions necessary to defeat it. For the first time it focuses the effort externally as opposed to previous NSSs which maintained an internal administrative stance toward international terrorism. The 2002 NSS acknowledges that America must make a concerted effort to disrupt the base of the insurgency in order to eliminate the terrorist threat. It also acknowledges that the endeavor will be difficult, lengthy and will require the active assistance of allies.

The 2002 NSS is not without fault, however. While defining actions to root out the fundamental causes of terrorism it defaults to the goal of establishing freedom and democracy in regions starved of liberty and governmental self-determination. A lofty goal no doubt, but a goal that is neither attainable nor desirable when examined from a practical standpoint.

Employing democracy as a tool to counter Islamic insurgency poses several problems for policy makers. The first is the possibility that efforts to install democracy could lead to the election of a legitimate Islamic extremist regime. How would such a regime fit into the U.S. strategic construct? The saying "Be careful what you ask for...you just might get it" could play heavily on U.S. foreign policy and counter-terror strategy in this instance. Could we see a duly elected Islamic extremist theocracy? It is not as far fetched as it may seem. In 1989 Algeria opened up the political process to free multi-party elections and suddenly found Islamists in power. Since then thousands have died in fighting between government forces and Islamic extremists. (Echeverria-Jesus, 2004)

The theory that says providing freedom and democracy to oppressed peoples will help in the fight against international terrorism sounds valid--at least from an American perspective. But what if one of those oppressive regimes happens to be a strategic ally whose government strongly supports U.S. interests and policy? Every U.S. National Security Strategy ever written has perpetuated the idea that America will stand by the principles of freedom and democracy. But in practice the track record is not quite as consistent as the stated policy. Today for instance, many of America's strongest strategic allies in the war on terror are not exactly pristine examples of democratic governance. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and Jordan are monarchies while Pakistan is

effectively, a military dictatorship. And the UNITED STATES is not looking to force changes there anytime soon.

But the jury is still out on the first attempt to push democratic regime change. Iraq is one test-bed worth paying close attention to. As it struggles with balancing its new-found democracy while battling to suppress the Islamic terror elements the final outcome remains in question. Instilling democracy elsewhere around the globe will not be an easy task either and the experiences in Iraq will probably make any administration think twice before deciding on regime change again.

The final test for the 2002 NSS will be the administration's ability to translate the rhetoric and lofty goals into cohesive and actionable policies. For America, the National Security Strategy should be an expression of grand strategy. But grand strategy cannot be just a "bumper sticker". It needs to be accepted and exercised across all branches of government and it needs to be the core element of policy.

National Strategy for Combating Terrorism

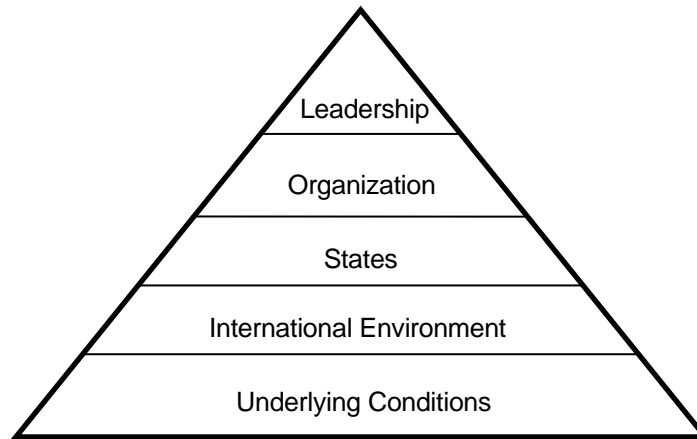


Figure 3. National Strategy for Combating Terrorism 2003, Structure of Terror (White House). In the opinion of the authors of the strategy, the figure illustrates the basic structure shared by terrorist organizations regardless of their interests and motives.

President George W. Bush signed *The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (NSCT) in February of 2003. As a follow-on to the 2002 *National Security Strategy* it specifically addressed America's Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), and establishes a "4D strategy" to achieve U.S. anti-terror objectives. "No group or nation should mistake America's intentions: We will not rest until terrorist groups of global reach have been found, have been stopped, and have been defeated" (p. 1). This statement establishes the intent of the effort but also reflects the superficial nature of the document itself. Unfortunately the NSCT is contradictory and somewhat disconnected from the fairly congruent NSS. To start, it defines the enemy as "terrorism – premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub-

national groups or clandestine agents” (p. 1). As stated earlier, defining terrorism as the enemy leads to a general misunderstanding of the problem. Terrorism is not the enemy. Terrorism is the preferred means by which Al Qaeda and its global network intend to achieve their objectives. The enemy is the global insurrection. It is the network of terrorist groups who are perpetuating the caustic extremist Islamic ideology which breeds more terrorists.

“Ours is a strategy of direct and continuous action against terror groups” (p. 2). This statement highlights the narrow scope of the conceptual framework of the document. It goes on to say how this continuous action will eventually degrade the terrorist organizations ability to act. The problem with this perspective is that it does not address the fundamental base of the problem...ideology. Again, going after the groups and not the ideology or environment that allows it to thrive will yield only partial successes. “The more frequently and relentlessly we strike the terrorists...the more effective we will be”(p. 2). This again might be a miss. If you take as a matter of fact that Al Qaeda's main grievances are U.S. policies toward Muslims, and that this fact is the keystone of Al Qaeda's support among the Muslim community, “relentlessly striking the terrorists” will not solve the problem and in fact it may actually exacerbate it. This will require the United States to maintain clarity of intent and ensure the message they send is not twisted to make the actions appear to be “another example of U.S. oppression against Muslims”.

The first “D” in the 4D strategy is *defeat*. This is probably the most non-contentious part of the strategy as defeating terrorist organizations is an inherent part of any strategy to deal with the global extremist insurrection. The problem lies in the definitions of “terrorist”. As stated earlier, there is no internationally agreed upon standard definition for terrorism. The problem obviously lies in the seams where one nation's view of a terrorist organization does not match another's.

The second “D” is *deny*. Here the strategy outlines efforts to deny sponsorship and sanctuary for terrorist organizations. Again, this is a non-contentious effort but potentially very troubling in application. As mentioned earlier, “One man’s freedom fighter...” Determining exactly what constitutes sponsoring and sanctuary for those organizations we might deem terrorists, is problematic at best. Would we target a group within a nation that other nations do not feel is a terrorist organization? Additionally, we may determine that an organization is not a terrorist group while the host or target nation does. Would that mean the United States would target that group?

The third “D” is *diminish*. This is the most problematic in the strategy because it displays a lack of a thorough understanding of the root cause of the global extremist insurrection. In section 3, Goals and Objectives, one of the stated objectives is to diminish the underlying conditions which support terrorist movements. In this section and throughout the strategy, the administration implies that economic deprivation is the main root of terrorist ideology: “People living with poverty, deprivation, social disenfranchisement, and unresolved political and regional disputes...” (p. 22). For the majority of the terrorist groups with international reach this is simply not the case.

With regard to economics, if we take Al Qaeda’s leadership discussed earlier as an example we see the fallacy in this argument. As noted, Osama bin Laden was a well established businessman in Saudi Arabia with a net worth approaching \$1 Billion by some estimates before taking up the extremist movement. Ayman al Zawahiri had multiple degrees and was a medical doctor in Egypt. Admittedly, Zawahiri gained his extremist perspective as a teenager well before he became a doctor. However, by any assessment these two most virulent examples of Islamic extremists could not possibly be categorized as destitute at the time answered the call to terrorism.

They are motivated by ideology, not economics, not finance, and not personal fulfillment. Additionally, many wealthy Arabs support Al Qaeda's actions either directly or indirectly by providing funding or other types of indirect support. Asserting that economic hardship is the root of terrorism will misdirect valuable time and resources toward a veritable red herring with little affect on the root causes. In addition, listing social disenfranchisement, unresolved political, religious and regional disputes as the root cause, makes the determination so broad it is not tenable as a legitimate objective.

It is true that the suicide bombers, rank and file operatives and foot soldiers fighting for Al Qaeda may be the products of economic depravity and hardship, but the leadership, organization and management for this insurrection are being provided by individuals driven by a much more than economic gain. An unwavering dedication to a virulent extremist ideology is the backbone of the global Islamic insurrection. This ideology is the center of gravity for the movement as a whole. Most assuredly, asserting that something as obscure as an ideology might be an adversary's center of gravity is probably considered profane in the context of today's military. After all, it is not a "characteristic, capability or locality" called for in Joint Doctrine. However, it is the single most significant item from which Al Qaeda draws its freedom of action and willingness to fight.

The problem rests in how to attack an ideology, especially one which is based on a radical interpretation of religious doctrine. Some may argue the Cold War was an example of an ideological fight. To some extent that assertion is true. However, the Soviet communist ideology was based primarily on economic grounds. Al Qaeda's theological-based ideology presents a much more substantial challenge to counter.

Of particular note with regard to Al Qaeda's extremist ideology is the fact that it is somewhat self-propagating. As Islam continues to spread around the globe so will the number of clerics who will trend toward strict and extremist interpretations. Couple this with Al Qaeda's robust propaganda campaign and it is readily apparent that without a significant counter-effort, the ideology will spread.

Surprisingly, when the NSCT discusses the network of Al Qaeda associated terrorist organizations it lists how they are linked through "funding, sharing intelligence, training, logistics, planning, and executing attacks" (p. 8) but it does not mention ideology. In doing so, the NSCT fails to identify the cognitive nature of the battle and falls short of defining the most complex effort in the war on terrorism.

The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America

On March 1, 2005, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld signed the latest version of the U.S. National Defense Strategy (NDS) and for perhaps the first time in history, America now has a National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy and National Military Strategy which are synchronized. These three documents contain a solid degree of continuity and commonality with regard to sense of purpose, unity of effort and clarity of focus. The 2005 NDS marks a significant step forward in defining the threat posed by the global extremist insurgency and establishing a fundamental methodology for defeating it.

As stated earlier, one of the common failures in previous strategic documents was the inability to clearly define the threat...the 2005 NDS breaks that mold. "Today's war is against terrorist extremist networks, including their state and non-state supporters..." (Department of


Defense, 2005, p. 8) The NDS stops short of categorizing the threat as the insurrection described earlier, but it does list some clearly defined measures to deal with the “terrorist network of networks”. Specifically, NDS 2005 lists eight target sets for terrorist vulnerabilities: (1) Ideological support; (2) Leadership; (3) Foot soldiers; (4) Safe havens; (5) Weapons – WMD; (6) Funds; (7) Communications and movement; and (8) Access to targets. (p. 8). Evaluating these specific target sets against how well they address the Three Tiered Model proposed earlier as *Al Qaeda's Strategic Framework*, we find that the new strategy addresses nearly all of the key factors associated with the first tier.

The new NDS also makes significant strides with regard to correcting other, previously identified strategic shortcomings. The first of these is the ideological problem the insurgency presents. As stated earlier, Al Qaeda's leadership is not only driven by extremist ideology but it uses that ideology as a basis to build support, justify attacks, and develop anti-U.S. sentiment in the Muslim community. The NDS tackles this problem by directing actions to “support models of moderation in the Muslim world” (p. 9). The efforts addressed in the document are focused specifically at improving the perception of the United States throughout the Muslim community and countering the appeal of the terrorists. “As in the Cold War, victory will come only when the ideological motivation for the terrorists' activities has been discredited and no longer has the power to motivate streams of individuals to risk and sacrifice their lives” (p.9). In making this statement, the NDS acknowledges not only the scope and depth of the problem, but also alludes to the persistence required to prevail.

Taken as a whole, the 2005 National Defense Strategy is the single most coherent unclassified counter-terrorism strategy document to ever come out of Washington D.C. It may not

be perfect but given the incoherent and often contradictory policies seen previously, it marks a significant and encouraging step in the right direction. The proof of success however will come in the ability of the Department of Defense to translate the strategy into coherent policies and capabilities to counter the threat and how well it integrates those policies with other government agencies.

U.S. National Military Strategy

 Department of Defense Strategic Framework for the War on Terror

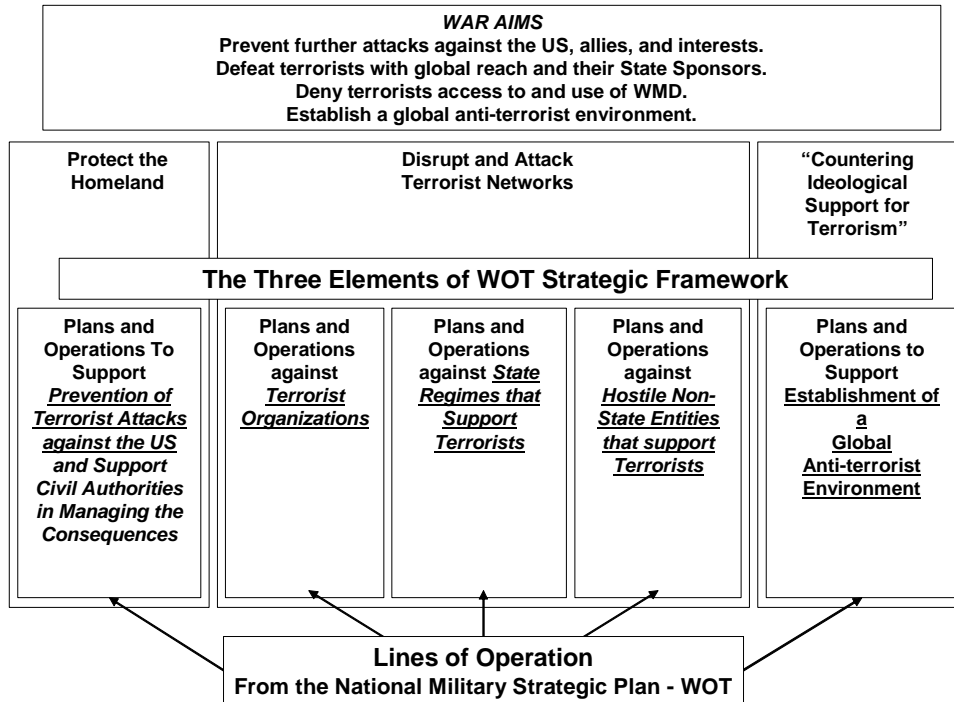


Figure 4. Strategic framework for National Military War on Terror. Taken from a Pentagon briefing presented on November 16th, 2004 to the Joint Advanced Warfighting School.

The Department of Defense WOT Strategic Framework offers a well defined model for the development of a strategic plan to counter international terrorism. The five lines of operation are directly linked to objectives listed in the National Security Strategy. The first four lines of operation have been addressed to a sufficient extent earlier and do not need repeating here. The fifth line of operation addresses the problem of defining the root cause of the global insurrection discussed above.

With regard to international terrorism, the NMS addresses the problem primarily from the perspective of protecting America. The main concern is that a terrorist entity will obtain and employ WMD against the United States. Much like the NDS, the NMS acknowledges the importance of “diminishing the conditions that permit terrorism to flourish” (p. 10). The NMS answers the questions regarding the global insurrection only in the broadest sense and does not establish concrete measures to be taken along the lines of those spelled out in the 2005 NDS.

Conclusion

Since September 11, 2001, everything has changed – and yet nothing has changed. The only difference between February 26, 1993, and September 11, 2001, is that there are 3,500-odd more people dead. We are still vulnerable. We have only a short time to prevent the next chapter from unfolding. This is the most important battle of our time. Today we still have a window of opportunity to prevent further devastation. But the window won't be open for long. (Emerson, p. 25).

Today the world is facing a global insurgency. In order to defeat that insurgency we will need to advance on several lines of operation simultaneously within the context of a coherent counter-insurgency strategy. Perhaps the best term to describe the U.S. counter-terror strategy today is “evolving”. The 2005 National Defense Strategy is a significant improvement but more work needs to be done.

America is still struggling with how to define the threat. Nearly four years into the War on Terror this is quite frankly inexcusable. Some may argue that calling the threat an insurrection is overly hawkish or pessimistic. The terrorist rhetoric, actions, practices, procedures and stated objectives argue otherwise. Arguing over the fact is counter-productive, but failing to appropriately define the problem could be catastrophic.

It is time for America and the rest of the western world to respect the threat Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda present to the future. The threat is not only to our security and economy but our way of life and the future of free governments around the world, and the terrorists have said as much. Osama bin Laden is a charismatic leader; a skilled and battle-tested warrior; an intelligent, strategically grounded and tactically sound military commander, and he is our enemy. He is well respected across the Muslim community for what he says and what he does, which is oppose the United States wherever and whenever he can. To some he has become the Robin Hood of the Muslim world, in their eyes he's a freedom fighter. He is an adaptive, capable and unrestrained adversary driven by a firm belief in a self-propagating ideology founded on an extreme interpretation of Islam, and he is determined to win this fight.

The focus must be on destroying the global network of terrorist organizations while defeating the extremist ideology. Simply disrupting attacks, destroying terrorist cells, and capturing or killing terrorist leaders will not win this war. What makes this challenge especially daunting is the fact that the ideology is based on religion, the fastest growing religion on the planet. The battles will be fought in the physical domain, but the war will be won in the cognitive. This fight will be different from any we have experienced in the past...but the idea that the military will only play a small role is hogwash.

Education is the key. We are seeing progress in this area as countries like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia initiate programs to monitor sermons in their mosques and classes in the madrassas. Though we cannot be seen as interfering in internal affairs of Muslim states, we also cannot allow these radical indoctrination centers posing as schools in the Middle East, Central and Southern Asia graduate thousands of Islamic extremists every year. This will be a generational fight.

Contrary to what some may argue this is not all about U.S. policies in the Middle East. The argument that Al Qaeda is bent on attacking the United States because of America's policies in the Muslim world is at best only partly accurate. Yes, Al Qaeda and other Islamic extremist groups cite U.S. policies as the reason for their attacks, and some U.S. policies and actions represent a main source of irritation in the Muslim community. Additionally, this irritation makes the Muslim communities easy targets for the Al Qaeda propaganda machine. However, asserting U.S. policies are the sole reason for attacks on American interests ignores Al Qaeda's stated global objectives: the establishment of a Pan-Arab caliphate; the elimination of U.S. influence in the Middle East; and the destruction of Israel. U.S. economic, political and military power present in the Muslim world is the single biggest obstacle to the Al Qaeda network achieving their oft-stated goals. Changing U.S. policies vis-à-vis the Middle East will not significantly change America's image within the Muslim population without a serious concerted information effort to counter anti-U.S. propaganda.

Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will not fix the problem of Islamic extremism in the region either. First, the argument made regarding overall U.S. policy applies here as well. U.S. economic, political and military power in the region is the single greatest obstacle to Al Qaeda's ability to achieve its objectives. Second, as stated earlier, one of Al Qaeda's main objectives is the destruction of Israel. This stated objective not only runs counter to stated U.S. national interest and long standing U.S. policy, but clearly illustrates the fact that peaceful coexistence with Israel is an unacceptable end state from Al Qaeda's perspective. Although a negotiated peace agreement may help allay Arab-Israeli tensions within the general Arab populace, extremist groups will continue to act in accordance with their objectives.


Much has been said and written about the need to reduce U.S. dependence on Middle Eastern oil sources. Perhaps a U.S. economy free from dependence on foreign sources of energy, coupled with a subsequent reduced level of influence in the region, would help alleviate the anti-U.S. sentiment in the Middle East. However, given the current state of the world energy market, the likelihood of the United States withdrawing from this vital region is near zero. This concept is more a pipe dream than a panacea. The fact is the United States will not be able to eliminate its dependence on Arab oil in the near future. Thus, U.S. interest and subsequent influence in the region is not likely to decline anytime soon. America will remain the single biggest obstacle to Al Qaeda achieving its objectives in the Arabian Gulf – and thus will remain a target for terrorist activities.

Political correctness can lead to catastrophic failures in the prosecution of any strategy. This is especially the case given the nature of the problem posed by Al Qaeda and its affiliated network of terrorist organizations. Due to the fact that their virulent extremist ideology is founded in religion presents significant challenges for policy makers in a nation that values freedom of religion and abhors discrimination of any sort. Attempts to degrade or hinder counter-terror actions on grounds of racism or discrimination could hinder security practices, increase operating costs and endanger American lives. America's inability to set appropriate policies, because they may potentially impact certain ethnic groups to a greater extent than others, poses a significant risk to national security. Priority must be given to establishing policies based on logically sound principles. Where conflict arises, Constitutionality should be the determining factor not political correctness.

In order for any counter-terror strategy to be effective, the administrative and operational policies developed to support the strategy must also be coherent and integrated across all branches of government. We could have the most coherent strategy documents ever written but if we cannot translate them into clearly articulated actionable efforts the strategy becomes nothing more than a document.

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