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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.**

**Culture and Theology in the War against the Salafist-Jihadiyyah Islamist
Transnational Terrorist Threat - US Strategy Implications**

by

James L. Stockmoe

Colonel, US Army

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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23 October 2006

Abstract

Culture and Theology in the War against the Salafist-Jihadiyyah Islamist Transnational Terrorist Threat - US Strategy Implications

This paper examines the cultural and theological underpinnings of the Salafi-Jihaddiyah transnational Islamic threat we face. However complex and antithetical it may appear to us through our western prism, the Islamists are not nihilistic or apocalyptic. The Salafi-Jihadists have a strategic vision, objectives, and a desired end state. In turn, our strategy and operational framework must be tailored to counter the threat. We must have a corresponding strategy, vision, desired end state, commitment of resources, and resolve to defeat the threat. In many tangible ways, we have achieved a high degree of success already in combating the threat, but may not have accurately measured our success, our effectiveness, or understood that we retain the initiative to define conflict termination on our own terms. The paper offers an analysis of the Jihadists successes and failures, and in turn, our corresponding national security strategy, desired end state and intermediate objectives against the transnational Jihadi-Islamic terrorist threat; and finally, offers some thoughts on achieving lasting success in combating the Islamist threat.

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Culture and Theology in the War against the Salafist-Jihadiyyah Islamist Transnational Terrorist Threat - US Strategy Implications

Introduction

In order to understand and eviscerate the transnational Islamic threat¹ we face, we must understand the contextual inseparability of culture and theology. Culture is defined by ethnicity, religion, family, and in most of the world includes tribal customs.² Further, we must examine the link between culture and ideology. In the case of the Islamist transnational threat, the inescapable conclusion is that the threat is ideologically centered on Salafi-Jihadiyyah, a radical theological sect of Sunni Islam. Culture, and hence theology, or religion, is an inherent factor in the current transnational terrorist threat at all levels. However complex and antithetical it may appear to us through our western prism, the Islamists are not nihilistic³ or apocalyptic. The Salafi-Jihadists have a strategic vision, objectives, and a desired end state.

The first step in combating and defeating the transnational terrorist threat is to define and understand the Salafi-Jihadiyyah ideology through sound operational analysis. We must understand their vision, desired end state, intermediate objectives, capabilities, and intent. In turn, our strategy and operational framework must be tailored to counter the threat. We must have a corresponding strategy, vision, desired end state, commitment of resources, and resolve to defeat the threat. The complex urban terrain and amorphous nature of the threat makes this a difficult, but not impossible undertaking. In many tangible ways, we have achieved a high degree of success already in combating the threat, but may not have accurately measured our success, our effectiveness, or understood that we retain the initiative to define conflict termination on our own terms.

Rather than examine the full cultural underpinnings of the threat, to include the socio-economic factors, this paper will instead focus on the fundamental theological and ideological underpinnings of Salafi-Jihadiyyah Islamic tenets which largely define the transnational terrorist

threat, their operational art, and an analysis of their successes and failures to achieve their desired end state. In short, are they winning? In turn, we will evaluate our corresponding national security strategy; offer a corresponding assessment of the relative successes and failures in achieving our national desired end state and intermediate objectives against the transnational Jihadi-Islamic terrorist threat; and finally, offer some thoughts on achieving lasting success in combating the Islamist threat - - to borrow Vladimir Lenin's words, "*What is to be Done.*"⁴

Al Qa'eda's Strategy - Theological and Ideological Origins

While it would be easy to make sweeping generalizations regarding greater Islam and the current transnational threat, it would be equally wrong to do so. Clearly, all of Islam is not inherently hostile or intolerant of those that do not practice the Islamic interpretation of monotheism. The so-called "Islamic World" is pluralistic and multicultural, not monolithic or even pan-Islamic. As we will see, our National Security strategy itself strangely uses the "Islamic World" terminology, further contributing to the confusion. More accurately, an objective analysis indicates that the current Islamist transnational threat is driven by a radical, fundamentalist, Salafi-Jihadiyyah interpretation of Sunni Islam. Salafism is one of a multitude of Islamic sects, itself a subdivision of the two major ideologies of Islam, Sunni and Shi'a, caused by the Great Schism. No more than a tenth of Islam ascribes to Salafi-Jihadism. Further, one should not confuse Salafi-Jihadiyyah with a moderate Salafi-Dawa theology, which accepts modernity, residual vestiges of state power, and coexistence as inescapable; and, pragmatically desires to gain power through less violent, participatory political means.

Our current strategy to fight transnational Islamist terrorism routinely refers to the "Global War on Terrorism", itself confusing war against a tactic with an ideology, and creating a lack of clarity. In reality, the transnational terrorism threat largely emanates from Salafi-Jihadiyyah Islamist ideology, as described in numerous passages of the Qur'an, ascribed to the latter decade of

the Prophet Mohammad's life. This period, also known as the Medina period, follows Mohammad's migration to Medina, in what is now part of western Saudi Arabia.⁵ The Salafi-Jihadists contend that the verses in the Qur'an during this period compel armed struggle, or Jihad. An ideological and theological discourse on the "Jihad"⁶ in the context of the Qur'an far exceeds the scope of this paper. For brevity, a review of numerous treatises and Islamist foundational texts indicates transnational Islamist terrorist groups like al Qaeda believe Jihad is a fundamental Islamic belief, and not just a spiritual struggle (greater Jihad). Instead Salafi-Jihadists argue Jihad as a call to armed struggle (lesser Jihad).⁷

In essence, the Islamic transnational terrorist threat is a struggle against Islamic fundamentalists, Islamic reformists, Salafi-Jihadists, or what we often refer to simply as "Islamists." Whatever terminology we choose, they are all used interchangeably with subtle shades of essentially the same meaning. For clarity, the threat is not comprised solely of Arab Islamists. Transnational Islamist terrorist groups which draw their inspiration from Salafi-Jihadist teachings include al Qaeda⁸ (literally, "The Base"), multiple national variations of Islamic Jihad (Egyptian Islamic Jihad, or EIJ; Palestinian Islamic Jihad, or PIJ), Ansar al Islamija and Ansar al Sunna (AI/AS) (Northern Iraq, The West Bank), Abu Sayyaf (Philippines), Jamaa Islamija (Indonesia and Philippines), and numerous lesser known groups. Arab Islamic Jihadists collectively represent a significant, yet large minority ethno-nationality within the violent Islamist reform movement.

In brief, al Qaeda draws its ideological views from the Sunni Salafi-Jihadiyyah writings⁹ and exhortations of Taqi ad-Din Ahmed ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328)¹⁰, Jamal ad-Din Al-Afghani (1839-1897), Egyptian Grand Mufti Muhammed 'Abduh (1849-1905), Mohammed Rashid Ridha (1865-1935), Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949), Sayyid Qutb (1903-1966)¹¹, and Mohammad Abd al-Salam Faraj.¹² The Salafi-Jihadist ideological and theological epicenter is primarily Egyptian-based, with some Syrian and Palestinian influences. Usama bin Ladin and al Qaeda's ideologue

and chief protagonist, Dr. Ayman Zawahiri, are zealous advocates of the Egyptian Salafi-Jihadist school. Individually, these Salafi-Jihadist activists devoutly believe in the call to armed Jihadi struggle, or lesser Jihad, having suffered imprisonment and in some cases execution for their beliefs. It would be a monumental mistake to think that Salafi-Jihadists are open to opposing views emphasizing moderation.

Most Muslims do not accept Jihad as one of the pillars of Islam.¹³ The five commonly accepted pillars, or core beliefs, among the various Islamic sects include Imam, Salah, Zakat, Sawm, and Hajj.¹⁴ Whether or not the call to militant Jihad is a correct interpretation of Qur'anic verse, over a hundred verses ideologically inspire actions by the Salafi-Jihadists, and form the core of their beliefs. In essence, the Jihadists legitimize their terrorist actions by referencing numerous Qur'anic verses, and actions are more meaningful than words when it comes to their intentions.

For that matter, the underlying political, socio-economic conditions that are compelling Salafi-Jihadi terrorism, while important as root recruiting causes, are less important than the fundamental ideological underpinnings of their beliefs. If socio-economic conditions are the root cause of the threat from transnational terrorism, why are we not being attacked by Hindu, Buddhist, or disenfranchised third world Catholics? The simple answer is found in the Salafist-Jihadiyyah ideology. In other words, however nobly inspired, ameliorating socio-economic cultural factors such as poverty, unemployment, overpopulation, illiteracy, and tribal friction would have little or no impact on the Salafi-Jihadist recruitment of radicals. Arguably these actions would lessen the support Jihadists receive from the general Islamic community, which sympathizes and provides resources. However, the Jihadist world view is not dependent on the active support of the Islamic masses. Regardless, the Islamic Ummah, or masses, would likely continue to passively or tacitly accept their presence and activities, as long as it does not disrupt their daily lives.

As discussed, the cause and appeal of Salafi-Jihadism is more theologically-based than derivative of socio-economic conditions. In February of 1998, Usama bin Ladin, wholly lacking the spiritual authority to do so, issued a *Fatwa* urging *Jihad* against Americans. It directed all Muslims to “Kill the Americans” whenever and wherever they are “in order to [purpose] liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque [Jerusalem] and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip [the U.S. and Israel].” This appeal has little to do with socio-economic conditions. Further, the desired end state was to defeat and remove US forces from the lands of Islam and remove the threat they pose to Muslims.^{15 16} The method chosen decades before and honed in the mountains and training camps of Afghanistan was terrorism.

In summary, the strategy and associated intermediate objectives of the Salafi-Jihadists is to drive the infidels from historically Muslim lands; create a non-secular Third Caliphate; impose a Shari’a legal system; control their own natural resources for the benefit of the masses; and return to the fundamental teachings of Mohammad and the Islamic faithful during the three generations after his death. The desired end state is very similar to the Taliban-like society that existed in Afghanistan in the mid to late 1990’s. Understandably, this world view does not have universal appeal to the Islamic masses or any of the existing regional powers.

US Strategy, Desired End State, Vision, Intermediate Objectives

The September 2006 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* provides the United States’ “Strategic Vision for the War on Terror,” emphasizing winning a “battle of ideas” to defeat violent extremists who ascribe to a murderous ideology. It employs all of the instruments of national power to kill or capture the terrorists, deny safehavens, prevent them from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, and denial of resources. The long term goal is to create a “global environment inhospitable to violent extremists” and their supporters.¹⁷ The strategy does not specifically state that the Salafi-Jihadi theology forms the core of the threat, but it does state, “America is at war with

a transnational movement fueled by a radical ideology.”¹⁸ It elaborates, defining the terrorist threat as, “...a transnational movement of extremist organizations, networks, and individuals – and their state and non-state supporters – which have in common that they exploit Islam and use terrorism for ideological ends.”¹⁹

The earlier 2006 *US National Security Strategy* and 2003 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* specify, “...destroying the larger al Qa’eda network and also confronting the radical ideology that inspired others to join or support the terrorist movement... killing or capturing key lieutenants, eliminating safehavens, and disrupting existing lines of support.”²⁰ The 2006 *US National Security Strategy for Combating Terrorism* objectives include: countering the “ideology of terrorism” with effective democracy; preventing attacks; denying sanctuaries and the support of “rogue states”; denying terrorists control of any nation as a launching pad; and, building institutional structures to counter terrorism.²¹ These objectives are all achievable, although difficult to measure without knowing the full extent of the threat.

The long term US strategy for winning the war on terror stresses advancing effective democracy, to include respect for basic “...human rights, religious freedom, conscience, speech, assembly, association, press.” But, does democracy ameliorate the underlying conditions in the so-called Islamic or Muslim world? The US strategy for winning the war on terror envisions promoting democracies that “...maintain order within their own borders, address causes of conflict peacefully, protect independent and impartial systems of justice, punish crime, embrace the rule of law, and resist corruption.”²² Further, our strategy concludes terrorism’s causes include political alienation, perceived injustices, and “appeal of an ideology that excuses or even glorifies the deliberate killing of innocents.”²³

The one aspect of the strategy that seems unachievable is the invocation of democracy and the so-called “Freedom Agenda”. This is because freedom and democracy are counter-theological.

More specifically, freedom and democracy threatens Islamic traditions and their theocratic-based leadership structure, however appealing it may be to the United States to achieve this desired end state. The rate of socio-economic change must be balanced to avoid regional destabilization. While the US strategy is otherwise generally sound, the following statement demonstrates a profound misunderstanding or ignorance regarding Islam, and particularly Salafi-Jihadism, “The best long term answer to al Qa’eda’s agenda: the freedom and dignity that comes when human liberty is protected by effective democratic institutions.”²⁴ This statement is wholly ridiculous considering al Qa’eda seeks a Third Caliphate and could care less about freedom and democratic institutions.

The idea that if we just provide freedom, human dignity, and democratic institutions it will cause Jihadi extremists to moderate is completely baseless. The only way to deal with the Salafi-Jihadists is to kill them, or completely isolate through elimination of safehavens, and aggressive, unrelenting anti-terrorism measures as described in the strategy. As discussed previously, the Salafi-Jihadists seek nothing short of elimination of the infidels from *Dar al Islam*, or lands under fundamentalist Muslim governance.

Our strategy effectively defines the short and long term priorities. The four short-term priorities for combating terrorism are: prevent attacks by terrorist networks, deny weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to rogue states and terrorist allies, deny terrorists sanctuaries, and deny terrorists control of any nation for use as a launching pad for terrorism.²⁵ The long term strategy for combating terrorism includes: international accountability, strengthened coalitions and partnerships, enhanced interagency collaboration, and improved counterterrorism manpower.²⁶

How Are We Doing? An Assessment

The US strategy lists a number of successes to date, to include: depriving al Qa’eda of sanctuaries in Afghanistan; countering terrorism in Iraq; capturing and killing key al Qa’eda leadership; interdicting terrorist funding streams; building global consensus against terrorist

indiscriminate targeting of innocents; expanded international cooperation – legal, intelligence, diplomatic and military; disruption of attacks; creation of effective US counterterrorism structures and partnerships with allies; and, transformation without destabilizing key friendly regimes.²⁷ Again, the rate of change is a critical factor if we are to avoid harming our interests through destabilization of already friendly regimes that are achieving some degree of socio-economic progress, however gradual it may appear.

Challenges to our national strategy for combating terrorism include: dispersion and decentralization of terrorist networks; successful terrorist attacks outside the US; continued potential for attacks against the US; potential terrorist acquisition of weapons of mass destruction; continued terrorist sponsorship by Iran and Syria; terrorist activity in Iraq; successful information operations and access to media through the internet.²⁸ The strategy correctly points out, “What unites the threat is a common vision, common set of ideas about the nature and destiny of the world, and a common ushering in of totalitarian rule. What unites the movement is the ideology of oppression, violence, and hate.”²⁹ Again, while the National Strategy does not name the specific threat ideology, it is clearly Salafi-Jihadiyyah.

While the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* states that the transnational terrorist threat is not monolithic, it refers to the so-called “Muslim World” twice in the same reference. Al Qa’eda’s aim is “...to establish a single pan-Islamic, totalitarian regime that stretches from Spain to Southeast Asia.”³⁰ Al Qa’eda has failed to achieve this unity by any objective standard. “The terrorists distort the idea of jihad into a call for violence and murder against those they regard as apostates and unbelievers, including all those who disagree with them. Most of the terrorist attacks since September 11 have occurred in Muslim countries – and most of the victims have been Muslims.”³¹ Al Qa’eda has time and again failed to rein in its operatives, targeting innocent Muslims. In response, there are increasing indications that the mainstream Sunnis in Iraq and

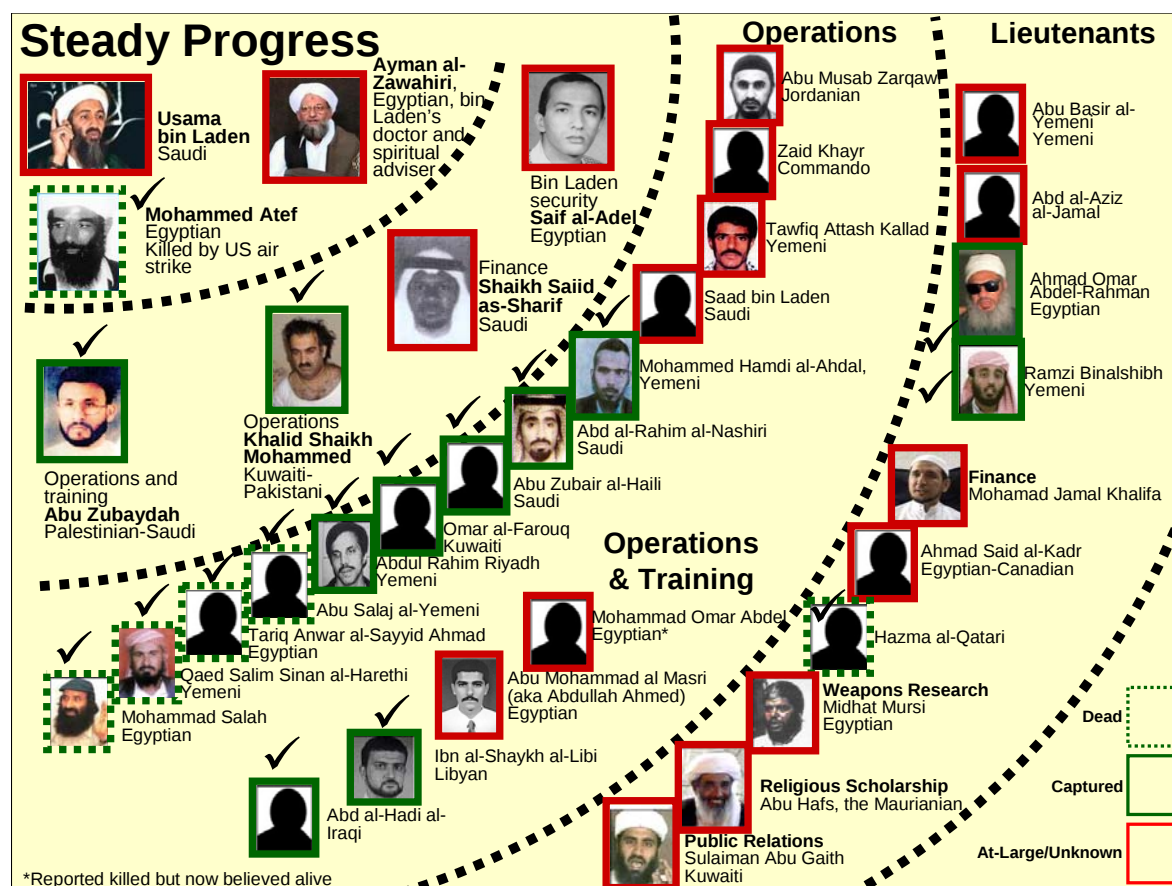
elsewhere are starting to turn on al Qa'eda.³² Internally, this is starting to cause serious fissures between the ideological leadership and those executing operational attacks. Prior to his timely demise, Abu Musaab al Zarqawi received two rebukes from al Qa'eda ideologue Ayman Zawahiri over the viciousness of his beheading tactics, and inopportune targeting of the Shi'a.³³ In a surprising revelation, the latter rebuke included a request for financial resources; what must have been a difficult and humbling request.

Our information operations are starting to exploit the lack of appeal by the Jihadists to more moderate Muslims. The information operations thematically emphasize that terrorists have "...a world vision darkened by hate, fear and oppression. They use suicide bombings, beheadings, and other atrocities against innocent people to promote their creed."³⁴ And, "For the enemy, there is no peaceful coexistence with those who do not subscribe to their distorted and violent view of the world."³⁵ Our strategy gets to the heart of the issue, stating, "Responsible Islamic leaders need to denounce an ideology that distorts and exploits Islam to justify murder of innocent people and defiles a proud religion."³⁶

Recently, President Bush, addressing the UN General Assembly stated, "Extremists in your midst spread propaganda claiming the West is engaged in a war against Islam. This propaganda is false, and its purpose is to confuse you and justify acts of terror. We respect Islam, but we will protect our people from those who pervert Islam and sow death and destruction."³⁷ President Bush also has repeatedly tied the transnational terrorist threat to Iraq. The President proclaims, "If America were to pull out of Iraq before Iraq could defend itself, the consequences would be absolutely predictable, and absolutely disastrous... al Qa'eda terrorists from all over the world would suddenly have a base of operations far more valuable than Afghanistan under the Taliban."³⁸

A View from Al Qa'eda's Cave

To begin with, the Jihadi Transnational terrorist threat has suffered some serious setbacks. First, al Qa'eda, literally "The Base" has lost its base! Secondly, the movement has suffered serious leadership losses. Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, also known as Abu Ayyub al-Masri, the new leader of al Qa'eda in Iraq recently lamented the loss of over 4,000 insurgents in Iraq.³⁹



[Source: 1st Infantry Division G2/ACE, Multiple Sources, Unclassified, As of: August 2005]

Figure 1. Steady Progress – al Qa'eda Leadership – Dead, Captured, and At-Large

Third, al Qa'eda has conducted operations through its many franchises in a vicious manner, an unappealing approach to mainstream Islam. Fourth, in its goal of establishing a Third Caliphate, it has not gained the support of a single Islamic nation-state. Among the three non-secular nation states that have a strict Sharia-based legal system, none are pro-Salafi-Jihadist - - Morocco, Saudi

Arabia, or Iran. Fifth, it has greatly reduced financial resources. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, al Qaeda and its franchises have a diminished capacity to inflict mass casualties, and is reduced to conducting less spectacular attacks, given the counter-terrorism measures now in place and increased vigilance of the target countries. In short, it does not present a credible strategic threat to the existence of the United States, its key allies, or for that matter any Islamic regime.

The Islamists have arguably committed a serious miscalculation, with numerous strategic setbacks caused by poorly constructed operational attacks that do not contribute to their desired end state. Collectively, the Salafi-Jihadists are nearing what I would call “Jihadist Overreach.” In the aftermath of 9/11, numerous disjointed attacks have reduced their appeal to moderate Muslims, to include: the Amman Jordan Wedding bombing; numerous beheading videos; the Madrid and London transit bombings; the second Bali bombing which killed mostly Muslims; attacks against Morocco and Egyptian resorts; and the senseless near destruction of the World Heritage Site Buddhist monuments in Afghanistan in 2001. While a large segment of Muslims are disenchanted with western values and perceived encroachment on their culture, the educated moderates are increasingly appalled by the deleterious actions of the Salafi-Jihadiyyah radicals. These attacks serve to alienate the Jihadists from the greater Islamic population.

This is not to say that the Jihadists have not conducted successful spectacular terror attacks. But terrorism is ultimately a political tactic. And, the scope and scale of attacks in Madrid, London, Bali, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and other locations have not exceeded 9/11, in spite of efforts such as the recent failed attempt to simultaneously destroy multiple aircraft over the Atlantic. Arguably, 9/11 itself succeeded beyond the expectation of the al Qaeda’s ideological leadership, leading to unintended consequences, such as loss of sanctuary, reduced capacity, and a temporary loss of appeal from moderate Muslims worldwide.

The initial US response to 9/11 eliminated al Qa'eda training camps and sanctuaries in Afghanistan. Thousands of al Qa'eda operatives were either killed or detained, to include crucial members of bin Ladin's inner leadership circle. This has greatly impacted al Qa'eda's capabilities, particularly the command and control, fundraising, and direct communications.

Following the demise of the Taliban government in Afghanistan and associated operational and geographic losses, the Taliban retreated into Eastern Pakistan. While Pakistani President Musharraf recently adopted a conciliatory approach that some would argue borders on appeasement, in exchange he reportedly received for a pledge to renounce violence within Pakistan. The Government of Pakistan signed a peace accord with pro-Taliban forces in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. In turn, Pakistan agreed to withdraw its troops from the region. However, the pact did not pertain to al Qa'eda, which remains a target of Pakistani and US forces. Still, the pact generated concern that Islamic extremist groups remain free to operate in Waziristan Province, Pakistan. It remains to be seen if the Pakistani approach will result in greater stability and reduce the threat of the Taliban. Regardless, the US will continue to pressure Pakistan to root out al Qa'eda operatives in the region.⁴⁰ It is in Pakistan's interest to continue to cooperate with the United States, however unpopular that may be domestically.

Former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency's Counter-terrorism Center (CTC), and more recently the Department of State's Coordinator for Counterterrorism, J. Cofer Black announced that 2002 experienced the lowest number of worldwide terrorist attacks since 1969. Specifically, Black stated, "A large number of terrorist suspects were not able to launch an attack last year because they were in prison. More than 3,000 of them are al Qa'eda terrorists, and they were arrested in over 100 countries."⁴¹ Further, he declared, "I would credit the overall post-9/11 worldwide security environment. Nations are on guard against terrorism. They are sharing intelligence and law enforcement information. They are arresting suspects. They are thwarting

attacks. Governments and financial institutions are drying up the terrorist's sources of revenue. Regional security organizations are steadily improving their counterterrorism mechanisms."⁴² The successful approach described in detail by Cofer Black included security, legal and legislative training; as well as financial crackdowns, intelligence cooperation, and anti-terrorism procedures.⁴³

One of the primary US Combatant Commands directly concerned with transnational terrorism is The United States Central Command. The Combatant Commander, General Abizaid, astutely focuses on the structures and authorities in place to deal with the new realities in the so-called Islamic world. He states simply, "...we've got to reform our structures, our authorities and our thinking to deal with the way the world is moving. You just can't let these places deteriorate...unless you are willing to accept what they bring you - - terrorism and crime."⁴⁴ In particular, he is concerned about overemphasis of the military instrument of national power, as he correctly notes, "Military power can gain us time...but that is about it." Further, "The best way to contain al Qa'eda is to increase the capacity of regional powers to deal with it themselves. The US can provide help training and equipping indigenous counterterrorism forces to break up al Qa'eda cells, but bigger changes that address the root causes of terrorism in the region must take places over years, if not decades. We tend to be very impatient and want democracy to form tomorrow, but reform paced too quickly can have unintended consequences."⁴⁵

One Approach - Declaring Victory

In a recent article published in Atlantic Monthly, titled "Declaring Victory," author James Fallows makes a compelling case that we are winning the global war against al Qa'eda and its franchises. He captured the numerous views of over 60 experts participating in a 9/11 Anniversary conference to discuss the threat and our corresponding strategy. His conclusion, supported by a broad consensus of the participants is that al Qa'eda was failing to achieve its strategic goals and perceptively losing its appeal to Muslims.⁴⁶ Seen through bin Ladin's eyes, the Islamists were

losing the decisive fight for the support of the Islamic masses, or *Ummah*.⁴⁷ In essence, viewed from al-Qaeda's perspective, we are winning and have greater leverage than is popularly assumed or realized.⁴⁸ The bottom line, "...because of al-Qaeda's own mistakes, and because of the things the United States and its allies have done right, al-Qaeda's ability to inflict direct damage in America or on Americas has been sharply reduced...its hopes for fundamentally harming the United States now rest less on what it can do itself than on what it can trick, tempt, or goad us into doing. Its destiny is no longer in its own hands."⁴⁹ Simply put, Al Qaeda no longer endangers the fundamental existence of the United States, if it ever has. The experts' consensus is that a 9/11-scale coordinated attack was probably too hard for today's atomized terrorist groups to pull off.⁵⁰

According to Michael Jenkins, RAND veteran terrorism expert, "Because of increased intelligence efforts by the United States and its allies, transactions of any type-communications, travel, money transfers-have become more dangerous for the jihadists. Training and operations have been decentralized, raising the risk of fragmentation and loss of unity. Jihadists everywhere face the threat of capture or martyrdom."⁵¹ In addition, Michael Scheuer, Chief of the CIA's Usama bin Ladin unit from 1995 to 1999 and a special adviser to it for three years after 9/11, points out that, "Al Qaeda is being hunted by the most powerful nation in the history of the world, has suffered heavy personnel losses, and the United States has not yet made the full destructiveness of its power felt. Al Qaeda has lost its command structure, eliminated their sanctuaries, reduced their freedom of maneuver."⁵² Without these operational functions, al Qaeda is reduced to an ideological role.

The effects of our targeting and successful antiterrorism efforts against al Qaeda are underappreciated by the US and its allies. As David Kilcullen, Assistant Secretary of State for Counterterrorism Policy describes, "The al-Qaeda that existed in 2001 simply no longer exists. In 2001 it was a relatively centralized organization, with a planning hub, a propaganda hub, a leadership team, all within a narrow geographic area. All that is gone, because we destroyed it."⁵³

Further, “Where bin Ladin's central leadership team could once wire money around the world using normal bank networks, it now must rely on couriers with vests full of cash. Where bin Ladin's network could once use satellite phones and the Internet for communication, it now has to avoid most forms of electronic communication, which leave an electronic trail back to the user.”⁵⁴

According to Peter Bergen, author of *The Usama bin Ladin I Know: Bin Ladin and al-Zawahiri* now send information out through videotapes and via operatives in Internet chat rooms. “The Internet is all well and good, but it's not like meeting face to face or conducting training,”⁵⁵ and, “...most experts agree that the combination of routing the Taliban, taking away training camps, policing the financial networks, killing many al-Qaeda lieutenants, and maintaining electronic and aerial surveillance has put bin Ladin and al-Zawahiri in a situation in which they can survive and inspire but not do much more.”⁵⁶

Reinforcing these arguments that we are winning, Martin van Creveld, a military historian at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the author of *The Transformation of War* relates, “Usama bin Ladin is almost irrelevant, from an operational point of view. This is one reason why he has to keep releasing videos.”⁵⁷ Bin Ladin has released 24 recorded messages between 9/11 and the fifth anniversary of the attack. Further, Caleb Carr, a history professor at Bard College and the author of *The Lessons of Terror*, decrees, “They [al Qaeda] already were a global philosophy, but they used to have a command structure too. It's like the difference between Marxism and Leninism, and they're back to just being Marx.”⁵⁸

Regarding the loss of sanctuary, Marc Sageman, author of *Understanding Terror Networks* notes, “before 9/11, people attracted to the terrorist cause could come to Afghanistan for camaraderie, indoctrination, and specific operational training. “Now you can't find al-Qaeda, so it's difficult to join them, people have to figure out what to do on their own.”⁵⁹ Segman further points out, “The other part of a battle of ideas is the ability to offer a positive vision, and there al-Qaeda's

failure has been complete,” and the shift to...successor groups has made it significantly harder for terrorists of any provenance to achieve what all of them would like: a "second 9/11," a large-scale attack on the U.S. mainland that would kill hundreds or thousands of people and terrorize hundreds of millions.”⁶⁰

Perhaps most importantly, according to Fallows, the experts are convinced the "nothing will ever top 9/11," with the obvious exception of terrorists getting hold of a nuclear weapon. But, as he points out, this is far harder and less likely than the public assumes. For a big, coordinated, non-nuclear attack, "the number of people involved is substantial, the lead time is long, the degree of coordination is great, and the specific skills you need are considerable. It's not realistic for al-Qaeda anymore.”⁶¹ The irony is that al-Qa’eda remains focused on spectacular attacks, when smaller economic targeting would potentially achieve far greater effects in the long term. These softer targets are more vulnerable and can produce greater cumulative damage.⁶²

What is to be Done - Thoughts on The Way Ahead

Overall, our strategy and approach to countering the Salafi-Jihadist Islamist transnational terrorism threat is sound, with the exception of our Freedom and democracy agenda. Regarding the freedom agenda, we must slow the velocity of change in traditional societies. This agenda is threatening and potentially destabilizing in itself. The freedom agenda is threatening and reduces international support from regional allies, as well as the critical support of the Islamic masses. Further, the Freedom Agenda under-appreciates the theological underpinnings of the Salafi-Jihadi threat. Mitigating the deplorable socio-economic and political conditions in the Islamic world, however noble, is unlikely to obviate the Jihadi threat. The primary reason is that the Salafi-Jihadist world view directly opposes the intercession of any secular government or political institution between the Ummah and Allah. The Jihadists are not interested in earthly political power. They are opposed to any intervention by “infidels” into their perceived domain to resolve their socio-

economic problems. Even mainstream Muslims distrust the United States, and oppose our intervention into their affairs, particularly when it supplants the existing tribal and traditional order. On the other hand, non-military assistance during natural and manmade disasters receives a much more favorable response, as indicated by our recent humanitarian aid efforts following the Tsunami in Southeast Asia and earthquake relief in Afghanistan.

As discussed, the experts are convinced we are achieving great success against al Qa'eda, when you look at what they have lost since 9/11, and their inability to achieve anything constructive. A Third Caliphate has been reduced to a ridiculous notion at this point. For that matter, moderate Arabs are repulsed by the vicious operations and tactics al Qa'eda and its followers have employed. While moderate Muslims appear at times gleeful when the attacks are executed against US and European targets, it is clear they would not want their children to be Salafi-Jihadists or want an Islamic state like the Taliban offered.

The "Declare Victory" approach described by James Fallows has merit, as it potentially marginalizes the Jihadists, while lessening their appeal. Without a galvanizing threat from the United States, the call to Jihad is diminished. That does not mean attacks will no longer occur, or that we should refrain from pursuing the Jihadi Islamists. To the contrary, we must hunt them down, kill them, capture them, keep them on the run, and further isolate them. Sanctuary denial should remain a key objective.

We must also deemphasize military action over economic, diplomatic, and informational activities, while continuing aggressive anti-terrorism initiatives, and shoring up partnerships with key regional allies, to include Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Egypt, and The Philippines. We should expand on the programs and progress described by former Ambassador Black - training, legal assistance, funding and joint operations. All of these activities should be done with minimal fanfare and far greater resources. The potential return on investment is clear.

Our information operations should emphasize the success we have had, while emphasizing the threat the Jihadists pose to the Islamic states, and the targeting and suffering caused by the Jihadists to mainstream Muslims.

Domestically, we need straight talk on the threat – specifically, recognition that Islamic Salafi-Jihadi beliefs form the root cause of the threat. Likewise, we should make it clear that we are not at war with Islam, just as mainstream Islam is not at war with us. We must ensure broad understanding that Salafi-Jihadists will continue to employ terrorism to promote their cause and beliefs, no matter how we address the socio-economic conditions in the so-called Islamic world. We should also continue to demand widespread denunciation of terrorism by responsible regional leaders. Diplomatically, we should encourage, cajole, demand, monitor accountability, and in selected cases insist on elimination of Salafist-Jihadi madrassas. Religious education accountability by nation states is necessary to stem the flow of future Jihadists.

If our diplomatic activities are executed with greater finesse, along with reengagement of our allies around the globe, we could achieve greater effects in isolating and eliminating the threat. We must also reengage the United Nations to assume a responsible role in denouncing the transnational terrorists, empowering and resourcing the nations that are fighting against the Jihadists, or taking action to isolate them. All of these activities require continued patience, reallocation of resources, and a slight modification of our strategy. Our mounting success against the threat is underappreciated, and short of declaring victory, it should be heralded.

¹ **Threat** is defined by two components, enemy capability and intent.

² **Culture**, defined as, “Shared beliefs and values of group: the beliefs, customs, practices, and social behavior of a particular nation or people – such as Southeast Asian culture. People with shared beliefs and practices: a group of

people whose shared beliefs and practices identify the particular place, class, or time to which they belong. Encarta, World English Dictionary, 1998-2005 Microsoft Corporation.

³ **Nihilists** believe in the total rejection of social mores: the general rejection of established social conventions and beliefs, especially of morality and religion. Nihilists believe that nothing is worthwhile: a belief that life is pointless and human values are worthless; disbelief in objective truth: the belief that there is no objective basis for truth; belief in destruction of authority: the belief that all established authority is corrupt and must be destroyed in order to rebuild a just society; **Nihilism** started as a Russian political movement: a political movement in late 19th-century Russia that sought to bring about a socially just new society by destroying the existing one through acts of terrorism and assassination [Early 19th century. German Nihilismus, Latin nihil "nothing"] Encarta, World English Dictionary, 1998-2005 Microsoft Corporation.

⁴ Vladimir I. Lenin, *What is to be Done*, Selected Works, Volume 1, 119 - 271. First published as a separate work in March 1902.

⁵ For a balanced, apolitical overview of the Meccan and Medinan periods of Mohammad's theological journey, recommend viewing Arts and Entertainment (A&E) Network's Biography Series, "Mohammad," as well as History Channel's "Inside Islam, A Sweeping Story of One of the World's Great Faiths." Both are available for purchase on their internet websites.

⁶ "**Jihad**, sometimes spelled **Jahad**, **Jehad**, **Jihaad** **Djehad** or **Cihad**, (جِدَاة) is an Islamist term, from the Arabic root ('to exert utmost effort, to strive, struggle'), which connotes a wide range of meanings: anything from an inward spiritual struggle to attain perfect faith to a political or military struggle to further the Islamic cause. Individuals involved in the political or military forms of jihad are often labeled with the neologism 'jihadist'." [http: www.reference.com](http://www.reference.com); Internet.

⁷ For an in depth analysis of al Qa'eda's ideological origins, see Christopher Henzel, "The Origins of al Qa'eda's Ideology: Implications for US Strategy," *Parameters*, Spring 2005, 69-80.

⁸ **Al Qa'eda** in Arabic means "The Base," a reference to the sanctuary they enjoyed in Afghanistan which provided dozens of training camps, Salafi-Jihaddiyah ideological teaching, and terrorist training and experimentation.

⁹ "Nearly all Muslims believe that the non-military jihad is the 'greater jihad' and the military jihad is the 'lesser jihad.'" [http: www.reference.com](http://www.reference.com); Internet.

¹⁰ Henzel, "The Origins of al Qa'eda's Ideology: Implications for US Strategy," 71.

"The medieval Sunni scholar Taqi ad-Din Ahmed ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) is an important reference for today's revolutionary Salafists. Ibn Taymiyya needed an argument that would rally Muslims behind the Mamluke rulers of Egypt in their struggle against the advancing Mongols from 1294 to 1303. Some objected that there could be no jihad against the Mongols because they and their king had recently converted to Islam. Ibn Taymiyya reasoned that because the Mongol ruler permitted some aspects of Mongol tribal law to persist alongside the Islamic *sharia* code, the Mongols were apostates to Islam and therefore legitimate targets of jihad. Today's revolutionary Salafists cite Ibn Taymiyya as an authority for their argument that contemporary Muslim rulers are apostates if they fail to impose *sharia* exclusively, and that jihad should be waged against them. Although Ibn Taymiyya's medieval theology is important to the contemporary Salafists, Salafism had its true origins in modern times, in the reform movement at Sunni Islam's Egyptian core in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This reform movement arose out of the reaction of Muslims in the Ottoman Empire to the growing dominance of the West in international politics, in science, and in culture."

¹¹ Sayyid Qutb, Chapter 4 – "Milestones," *Jihad in the Cause of God*, [http: www.youngmuslims.com](http://www.youngmuslims.com), www.ijtihad.org; Internet.

¹² Henzel, "The Origins of al Qa'eda's Ideology: Implications for US Strategy," 75.

"During the 1970s, one of those who spread Qutb's message and updated his strategy was Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj, an electrician and self taught theologian for the underground Jihad in Egypt. Tried as a leader of the conspiracy that assassinated Sadat in 1981, Faraj used the proceedings to present his manifesto, *The Neglected Duty*. Along with theological arguments justifying violence, *The Neglected Duty* echoes Qutb on the need for a strategy that attacks the 'near enemy'—apostate Muslim regimes—before the 'far enemy'—meaning Israel, the United States, and other Western powers interfering in the Muslim world. Faraj also accused the Muslim Brothers and the establishment Egyptian clergy of collaborating with the secular Egyptian regime. *The Neglected Duty* was widely read throughout Egypt and the Muslim world." Mohammad Abd Al-Salam Faraj, *The Neglected*

Duty, sections 68-70, trans. in Johannes J.G. Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat's Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York, Macmillan, 1986), 192. The title of Faraj's book is sometimes also translated as "The Forgotten Obligation."

¹³ "A few Muslims, mainly belonging to the community of the Khawarij, hold that there is a sixth pillar of Islam, *jihad* literally meaning "struggle" or "endeavor", often understood to refer to holy war. This is viewed by many as a misinterpretation, especially in the sense of conversion by sword; however, if the English use of "war" is meant spiritually/metaphysically (such as being "at war" with one's conscience), as opposed to literal armed conflict, it is considered to be the most precise and accurate translation. While jihad is widely considered a duty of Muslims, it is not specifically outlined as a pillar of Islam in either tradition or the Qur'an," [http: www.reference.com](http://www.reference.com) ; Internet.

¹⁴ The Five Pillars of Islam:

1. **Imam:** Reciting the Shahadra, "La ilaha ila Allah, Muhammadur-rasul Allah," or "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet."
2. **Salah:** Prayer five times a day: dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, nightfall.
3. **Zakat:** Financial obligation of charity.
4. **Sawm:** Fasting during the month of Ramadan between dawn and dusk
5. **Hajj:** Making the pilgrimage to Mecca, for all physically and financially able

Source: [http: www.reference.com](http://www.reference.com); Internet.

¹⁵ Christopher M. Blanchard, "Al Qa'eda: Statements and Evolving Ideology," Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 20 June 2005, 6. "Text of Fatwa Urging Jihad Against Americans," *Al Quds Al Arabi* (London), Feb. 23, 1998. "Although he possesses no traditional Islamic religious credentials or authority, Bin Ladin issued a fatwa, or religious edict, in 1998 that claimed that the United States had made "a clear declaration of war on God, his messenger, and Muslims" through its policies in the Islamic world. The fatwa made use of the principle of defensive jihad to argue that U.S. aggression made armed resistance and the targeting of American civilians and military personnel incumbent upon all Muslims."

¹⁶ Shaykh Usamah Bin-Muhammad Bin-Ladin, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Amir of the Jihad Group in Egypt, Abu-Yasir Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Egyptian Islamic Group, Shaykh Mir Hamzah, Secretary of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Pakistan, Fazlur Rahman, Amir of the Jihad Movement in Bangladesh, "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders," *World Islamic Front Statement*, 23 February 1998:

"Praise be to Allah, who revealed the Book, controls the clouds, defeats factionalism, and says in His Book: "But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war)"; and peace be upon our Prophet, Muhammad Bin-'Abdallah, who said: I have been sent with the sword between my hands to ensure that no one but Allah is worshipped, Allah who put my livelihood under the shadow of my spear and who inflicts humiliation and scorn on those who disobey my orders. The Arabian Peninsula has never -- since Allah made it flat, created its desert, and encircled it with seas -- been stormed by any forces like the crusader armies spreading in it like locusts, eating its riches and wiping out its plantations. All this is happening at a time in which nations are attacking Muslims like people fighting over a plate of food. In the light of the grave situation and the lack of support, we and you are obliged to discuss current events, and we should all agree on how to settle the matter. No one argues today about three facts that are known to everyone; we will list them, in order to remind everyone: First, for over seven years the United States has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples. If some people have in the past argued about the fact of the occupation, all the people of the Peninsula have now acknowledged it. The best proof of this is the Americans' continuing aggression against the Iraqi people using the Peninsula as a staging post, even though all its rulers are against their territories being used to that end, but they are helpless. Second, despite the great devastation inflicted on the Iraqi people by the crusader-Zionist alliance, and despite the huge number of those killed, which has exceeded 1 million... despite all this, the Americans are once again trying to repeat the horrific massacres, as though they are not content with the protracted blockade imposed after the ferocious war or the fragmentation and devastation. So here 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, the strongest neighboring Arab state, and their endeavor to fragment all the states of the region such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Sudan into paper statelets and through their disunion and weakness to guarantee Israel's survival and the continuation of the brutal crusade occupation of the Peninsula. All these crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on Allah, his messenger, and Muslims. And ulema have throughout Islamic history unanimously agreed that the jihad is an individual duty if the enemy destroys the Muslim countries. This was revealed by Imam Bin-Qadamah in "Al- Mughni," Imam al-Kisa'i in "Al-Bada'i," al-Qurtubi in his interpretation, and the shaykh of al-Islam in his books, where he said: "As for the fighting to repulse [an enemy], it is aimed at defending sanctity and religion, and it is a duty as agreed [by the ulema]. Nothing is more sacred than belief except repulsing an enemy who is attacking religion and life." On that basis, and in compliance with Allah's order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies -- civilians and military -- is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty Allah, "and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together," and "fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah." This is in addition to the words of Almighty Allah: "And why should ye not fight in the cause of Allah and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed)? -- women and children, whose cry is: 'Our Lord, rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from thee one who will help!'" We -- with Allah's help -- call on every Muslim who believes in Allah and wishes to be rewarded to comply with Allah's order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. We also call on Muslim ulema, leaders, youths, and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan's U.S. troops and the devil's supporters allying with them, and to displace those who are behind them so that they may learn a lesson. Almighty Allah said: "O ye who believe, give your response to Allah and His Apostle, when He calleth you to that which will give you life. And know that Allah cometh between a man and his heart, and that it is He to whom ye shall all be gathered." Almighty Allah also says: "O ye who believe, what is the matter with you, that when ye are asked to go forth in the cause of Allah, ye cling so heavily to the earth! Do ye prefer the life of this world to the hereafter? But little is the comfort of this life, as compared with the hereafter. Unless ye go forth, He will punish you with a grievous penalty, and put others in your place; but Him ye would not harm in the least. For Allah hath power over all things." Almighty Allah also says: "So lose no heart, nor fall into despair. For ye must gain mastery if ye are true in faith."

¹⁷ United States of America, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, September 2006, 7.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1.

¹⁹ Ibid., 5.

²⁰ Ibid., 1.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 9.

²³ Ibid., 10.

²⁴ Ibid., 1.

²⁵ Ibid., 11-16.

²⁶ Ibid., 19-21.

²⁷ Ibid., 3.

²⁸ Ibid., 4.

²⁹ Ibid., 5.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² David Ensor, "Al Qa'eda Letter Called 'Chilling; Al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi: Prepare for the US to Leave Iraq Soon,'" CNN.com, 11 October 2005.

³³ Ibid. CNN.com

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- ³⁴ *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, September 2006, 5.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.
- ³⁷ Farah Stockman, "Bush Reaches Out to Muslims at UN, Offers Assurances to People of Iran," *Boston Globe*, 20 September 2006, [http: www.boston.com](http://www.boston.com); Internet.
- ³⁸ The Associated Press, "Bush: Iraq a 'Decisive Ideological Struggle,' President Predicts Victory Despite Disillusionment," *The Associated Press*, 31 August 2006, [http: www.msnbc.msn.com](http://www.msnbc.msn.com); Internet.
- ³⁹ The Associated Press, "Audio of al-Qaeda in Iraq Leader Says More than 4,000 Foreign Insurgents Have Died in Iraq," as carried in the *International Herald Tribune*, 28 September 2006. [http: www.ihf.com](http://www.ihf.com); Internet.
- ⁴⁰ Michael A. Fletcher, "Bush Warns of Enduring Terror Threat; Words of Bin Ladin, Allies Show Their Goals, He Says," *Washington Post*, 6 September 2006, 1.
- ⁴¹ J. Cofer Black, *Success in the Global War on Terrorism*, US Department of State, International Information Programs, 1 May 2003.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ Greg Jaffe, "A General's New Plan to Battle Radical Islam, Top Commander Gen. Abizaid Uses Soldiers to Build Health Clinics and Dig Wells. But Is It Enough?; Learning from Hezbollah," *Wall Street Journal*, 2 September 2006, 1.
- ⁴⁵ A General's New Plan to Battle Radical Islam, Top Commander Gen. Abizaid Uses Soldiers to Build Health Clinics and Dig Wells. But Is It Enough?; Learning from Hezbollah, *Wall Street Journal*, September 2, 2006, 1.
- ⁴⁶ James Fallows, "Declaring Victory," *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 2006. [http: www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com); Internet.
- ⁴⁷ **Ummah** or **Ummahh**: community of faithful within Islam: within Islam, the community of the faithful that transcended long-established tribal boundaries to create a degree of political unity, Encarta ® World English Dictionary & 1998-2005 Microsoft Corporation.
- ⁴⁸ Fallows, *Declaring Victory*, " [http: www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com); Internet.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, www.theatlantic.com.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, [http: www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com); Internet.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, [http: www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com); Internet.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, [http: www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com); Internet.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, [http: www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com); Internet.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, [http: www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com); Internet.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, [http: www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com); Internet.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, [http: www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com); Internet.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, [http: www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com); Internet.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, [http: www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com); Internet.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, [http: www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com); Internet.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, [http: www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com); Internet.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, [http: www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com); Internet.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, [http: www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com); Internet.