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INFORMATION OPERATIONS IN IRAQ: THE MUFSIDDOON VERSUS THE U.S. AND
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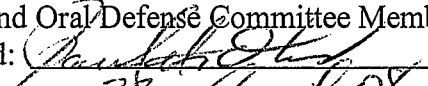
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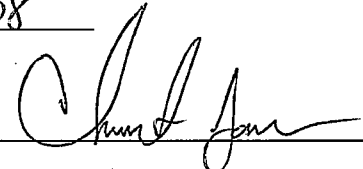
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Table of Contents

	Page
Disclaimer.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Chapter I – Introduction.....	5
Chapter II – Enemy Use of IO in Iraq.....	6-9
Chapter III – U.S. Use of IO in Iraq.....	10-17
Chapter IV – Potential IO Strategies for the U.S.....	17-25
Chapter V – Conclusion.....	25-26
Endnotes.....	27-28
Bibliography.....	29-30

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: Information Operations in Iraq: The Mufsidoon versus the U.S. and Coalition Forces

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Thesis: Despite the United States' initial difficulties with Information Operations (IO) in Iraq, the U.S. military can still wage a successful IO campaign if proper focus is placed on training the military in IO and better utilization of the power of words in the media.

Discussion: The terrorists in Iraq have outperformed the U.S. and Coalition Forces in IO throughout most of 2003-2007. They have made great use of the media in projecting their messages. Of particular note is the amount of effort that has gone into their internet effort. Currently there are thousands of websites affiliated or connected to the terrorists' major websites. These websites have helped to generate international media coverage and have helped promote the terrorists' cause. The terrorists have also taken advantage of the United States' IO blunders with the media. The U.S. has inadvertently helped the terrorists' efforts to legitimize themselves by using words such as *mujahedeen* and *jiha*d / *jiha*d*ist* to describe them. Other U.S. IO blunders have been: misunderstandings of the Iraqi culture, convoluted IO approval procedures, and poor use of the media and public affairs. Despite the many difficulties experienced with the U.S.'s IO efforts, there have been successes particularly with the use of ridicule and combat camera to counter the terrorists' propaganda.

There are several potential IO strategies that might help the U.S. They are 1) using the enemy's language against him; 2) branding the enemy as *mufsidoon* committing *hirabah*; 3) making better use of the media (particularly the local Iraqi media); 4) training U.S. and Iraqi forces on how to interact with the media; and 5) ridiculing the enemy and making him an object of derision. The most important of these is ensuring that the U.S. forces receive adequate training on IO (particularly the PSYOPs portion). If IO is critical to the success of a counterinsurgency, the U.S. can better achieve success by ensuring that adequate training is provided to its forces in IO. The second most important IO strategy is branding the terrorists as *mufsidoon* committing *hirabah*. Words are critically important and the U.S. can make better use of the Arabic language in describing the terrorists and their actions.

Conclusion: Despite the U.S. initial blunders, the U.S. and Coalition forces can still wage a successful IO campaign. If proper training in IO is provided to the U.S. and Coalition forces and the power of words is better utilized in the media, we can have IO success in Iraq.

Chapter I - Introduction

In a counter insurgency (COIN) environment the Information Operations (IO) effects are often more important than the kinetic effects. In Iraq an IO battle is being waged between the insurgents and the U.S. / coalition forces. One of the key components of this battle is who will have greater success in utilizing Psychological Operations (PSYOPSs) and leverage of the media. The insurgents have proven remarkably adept at maximizing the usage of the media to further their IO campaign. While the U.S. is constrained by telling the truth, the insurgents do not have that constraint and have taken full advantage of it. Although the U.S. has struggled with their IO campaign, they have had some limited successes, notably their use of ridicule against Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). This paper will investigate the usage of the media and PSYOPSs by the terrorists and the U.S. / coalition forces in Iraq from 2003-2007.

The insurgents in Iraq have made very effective use of the media to further their IO campaign. Unfortunately the U.S. has not done as well in this aspect. While the U.S. has had great success with its kinetic effects, members of the U.S. government and military have not given IO the emphasis that it needs in a COIN environment. To win in Iraq, the United States must win the information operations aspect of the conflict. The military IO effort can help achieve this by utilizing the insurgents' words and actions against them, influencing Iraqis by better use of the media, properly training U.S. / coalition forces on IO and media operations, and maximizing on the power of words to drive a rift between the terrorists and the Iraqi people.

Despite the United States' initial difficulties with IO in Iraq, the U.S. military can still wage a successful IO campaign if proper focus is placed on training the military in IO and better utilization of the power of words in the media.

Chapter II - Enemy use of IO in OIF

The insurgents in Iraq understand the value of the media and are making great use of it in their IO campaign. Throughout this paper, the word terrorist / terrorists will be used to describe the insurgents who target innocent Iraqis. One of the terrorist IO campaign designers stated on a terrorist website: "The camera has more importance than the weapon, video is worth more than a thousand sermons."¹ The terrorists structure their kinetic efforts to support their IO, rather than trying to structure their IO to support kinetic effects as the U.S. has done in the past.

The terrorists' IO campaign has two target audiences. The first audience is the young, intelligent, educated middle class who are the future of the Arabic world. Internet sites and television are the primary medium used to address that audience. The second target audience is the Iraqi people. Pamphlets and television are the primary means the terrorists use to address them.² Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) has three goals for their PSYOPSs efforts: 1) promote the message that AQI is the defender of Iraq and Islam against the U.S., 2) ensure that the local population supports them or is too fearful to resist, and 3) to recruit new members.

The internet has proven to be the greatest media success story for the terrorists in Iraq. The interest generated by their websites is intense and often surpasses interest in the mainstream media outlet websites. For example, AQI's websites have a greater reach than the websites of the leading Arabic-language daily Al-Hayat.³ AQI's message that they are defending Iraqis from the U.S. and defeating the U.S. is the main focus of their websites. When viewing the websites it seems as if AQI is conquering the U.S. forces in Iraq. AQI's website runs a daily count of their version of the number of U.S. military personnel killed in Iraq. As of January 2008, their website claimed credit for 35,000 U.S. dead. This claim is reinforced by new video posted on

the AQI website indicating a running tally of U.S. personnel killed in the attacks. To the Arab viewer who does not look at other websites for verification and only views the terrorists' websites, it would seem that those numbers are correct. AQI's message that they are winning in Iraq is effectively advanced with these websites.

Every insurgent website has a professional look including the usage of different logos for different groups. When viewing their logos, it is obvious that a professional designed these logos and created each logo to appeal to one of the two target audiences of AQI. The websites look as professional as various mainstream media websites. One of the ways terrorists maximize their viewers is by creating competitions in which viewers can vote on their favorite movies on the different websites. For instance, Ansar al Sunna has a website called "Top 20" that was created to show the best films of attacks on coalition forces based on the films who received the most votes.⁴ One of the most popular films was "Juba, the sniper of Baghdad." Juba has a website exclusively dedicated to his exploits. In his website he claims to have killed hundreds of coalition forces, and there are numerous videos of coalition forces being shot offered as evidence.⁵ Every one of his videos evidences a professional production. The camera is always positioned professionally to frame the U.S. victim in the center of the screen. The sniper shot is taken only when a maximum visual effect can be created.

Another of the "Top 20" is "Just Vengeance," a 28 minute film showing the execution of Shi'a police officers supposedly involved in the rape of a Sunni woman. This is another example of the effective PSYOPS campaign by the terrorists in which they capitalize on an event that receives national press coverage and claim to be the defenders of the Iraqi people. On February 19, 2007, Al-Jazeera released an interview with an Iraqi Sunni female, Sabrin al-Jabini, who claimed to have been raped by Shi'ite Interior Ministry officials.⁶ A firestorm of publicity

followed this case on Al-Jazeera and other Arab television networks. The Iraqi government was slow to respond both to the press and also about their plan to bring the perpetrators to justice. AQI maximized the propaganda value in this and quickly put out numerous statements on their websites and produced pamphlets vowing revenge on those involved in the rape. AQI also claimed that they would ensure that justice was served unlike the Iraqi government who didn't care about the Iraqi people.

On April 20, 2007, Ansar al-Sunnah released "Just Vengeance" in which they claimed to bring justice to the evildoers and, as a result, added legitimacy to their group.⁷ "Just Vengeance" is a good example of how well the terrorists execute their PSYOPS campaigns. The film begins with a statement by AQI's spokesperson acting as a credible news anchor and reporting that the following footage is about the guilty parties involved in the Sabrin al-Jabini rape. Next, video footage is shown of twenty Iraqi government officials in uniform confessing to involvement in the rape. The announcer then shows video of an ultimatum that has been given to the Iraqi government to release Sunni women being held in government prisons in order to prevent their rape by Shi'ite officials. The ultimatum also gives the names of the twenty 'guilty' individuals and their confessions and demands that the Iraqi government bring them to justice. The announcer then explains that the Iraqi government has not released the "innocent" Sunni women and also refuses to bring to justice the twenty government officials that AQI is holding. Video is shown of an "Islamic court" sentencing the twenty Iraqi government officials to death. The announcer explains that the next portion of the video will show the sentence being carried out. The last portion of the film shows the execution of the Iraqis by pistol shots to the back of the head. It is obvious that the execution was produced for video. From the video it is apparent that there were two camera men with high-tech gear, filming the execution from multiple angles.

The film ends with AQI claiming to be the upholder of justice and the defender of woman for the Iraqis.⁸

As soon as new video is released on terrorists' websites, Al Jazeera usually runs a portion of it. This helps ensure that the terrorists' message gets out to a wider audience. The terrorists also make great usage of Al Jazeera and the local Iraqi media. They constantly monitor the Arab media creating messages that are specifically targeted to the interests of the Iraqi people in each area. For instance, in December of 2006, following Al Jazeera coverage of the smuggling of sheep to northern Iraq and Turkey, AQI immediately released pamphlets condemning the smuggling and also stating that they would act to prevent the smuggling. Al Jazeera covered AQI's release of the pamphlets and questioned Iraqi government officials about the smuggling. The Iraqi government immediately executed measures to stop the smuggling. After the reduction in sheep smuggling, AQI claimed responsibility for this and Al Jazeera covered AQI's claims, lending further legitimacy to the group.⁹

In addition to their effective PSYOPSs campaign, the terrorists have ensured their version of events is passed on to the mainstream media by effectively preventing foreign journalists access to Iraq. Starting in 2004, the terrorists targeted media members with the intention of keeping them within guarded areas. Currently there have been over 300 journalists killed in Iraq.¹⁰ AQI was very successful in keeping journalists from getting out into the country and reporting on the actual situation unless they were escorted by U.S. forces; however, when journalists were escorted by U.S. forces, the terrorists would claim that it was not fair and objective reporting and that the journalists were part of the U.S. propaganda effort. While that claim was not believed in the western world, many Arabs believed it was true.

Chapter III - U.S. use of IO in OIF Phase IV

Donald Rumsfeld stated, "If I was grading, I would say we probably deserve a 'D' or a 'D+' as a country as to how well we're doing in the battle of ideas that is taking place in the world today."¹¹

From the beginning, the United States has struggled with its IO effort in Iraq. There were several reasons for this: 1) lack of understanding of the Iraqis' culture and the ensuing loss of credibility among the Iraqis; 2) convoluted approval procedures for IO; 3) unintentionally reinforcing AQI's branding efforts; 4) not understanding the importance of words and unintentionally reinforcing the terrorist messages; and 5) poor use of the media and public affairs. Despite its struggles, the U.S. has experienced some successes: 1) effective utilization of combat camera to counter AQI propaganda; and 2) the effective usage of ridicule.

The basis for success in PSYOPSS is an accurate understanding of the culture you are trying to influence. The U.S. planners made the mistake of assuming that all Iraqi people had the same fundamental desires as Americans. For instance, before the war one of the main IO themes to the Iraqi people was that they would be much better off once Saddam was removed from power.¹² The planners defined '*better*' as not living under the harsh rule of a dictator and having a functioning democracy. They failed to realize that for most Iraqis, '*better*' meant having electricity, clean drinking water, functioning sewers, and food. Once Saddam was removed, the main focus of the U.S State Department was to get a democracy established vice establishing electricity, clean water, etc. The Iraqis were looking for the '*better*' life that had been promised by the U.S., and when the '*better*' life didn't happen the U.S. lost considerable credibility.

Another example of the U.S. losing credibility was the disbanding of the Iraqi Army. Prior to the start of hostilities, CENTCOM (while underneath General Zinni) had been utilizing PSYOPSS to encourage Iraqi soldiers and their leaders not to fight if the United States attacked them.¹³ A key component of the message was that if the Iraqis did not fight, they would survive, and the United States would take care of them after the war. CENTCOM (headed by General Tommy Franks) had continued this message and had planned to utilize Iraqi forces to help stabilize the country. That PSYOPSs theme was very successful and the majority of the regular Iraqi Army did not fight. When the CPA disbanded the Iraqi Army, the Iraqis felt betrayed a second time, and this further degraded the credibility of the U.S. messages.

For an IO theme to work, the nation putting it forth has to have credibility. The U.S. has struggled with its PSYOPSs efforts toward the Iraqi people since and has slowly been regaining credibility.

Convolutd Command and Control procedures

The U.S. has also struggled with an approval process for PSYOPSs. Throughout most of OIF, any PSYOPS message has had to be approved at the division level or higher. Getting approval has taken an inordinate amount of time and reduced the effectiveness of a *quick* and *timely* message. An example of this was the experience of Colonel Baker's Brigade when a vehicle-born improvised explosive device (VBIED) exploded on 19 Jan 2004 outside one of the main entrances into the Green Zone and killed more than fifty Iraqis. Colonel Baker's soldiers arrived on the scene right after the VBIED exploded to provide security and manage the consequences of the incident. A considerable number of international and Arab media arrived on scene within fifteen minutes and asked the U.S. forces for a statement. Colonel Baker was

instructed not to release any press statements nor to engage the media until higher headquarters had collected the facts and released them at a coalition-sponsored press conference that would be held later that day at 1600 Baghdad time.¹⁴

Meanwhile, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) was rapidly engaging the press and beginning their PSYOPSs effort. While Col. Baker and his soldiers were prevented from making any statements and were busy gathering facts for the higher headquarters briefing later that day, the terrorists made good use of that time to plant rumors in the street and also to give prepared statements to the media. According to the insurgents, the deaths were not caused by a VBIED; rather U.S. soldiers had overreacted to someone shooting at them from a nearby intersection and had massacred the Iraqis. Unable to get any statements from U.S. forces, the local media and Al Jazeera ran this story and tempers started to quickly heat up on the Iraqi streets. Colonel Baker asked permission to correct the record with the media but was still prevented by higher headquarters from doing that.¹⁵ Realizing that the situation was spiraling out of control, Col. Baker made the decision to have the field grade officers at the site hold a quick press conference to get out the accurate story. Unfortunately by this time the damage had already been done. Most Iraqis believed that U.S. forces had caused the deaths vice a VBIED.

In PSYOPSs and the news business, the first story out is the one that is usually believed. Trying to correct a story takes a tremendous amount of effort and is often unsuccessful. Colonel Baker's experience is a convincing illustration of this fact, and it demonstrated how the slow U.S. approval process allowed the terrorists IO efforts to succeed.

Use of words

“How can a man living in a cave out-communicate the world’s leading communications society?”¹⁶ Most military members admit that the U.S. is having difficulty winning the IO effort against AQI. One of the reasons for this is that the terminology we use to describe the terrorists is working against us. Words are important and can be weapons if used properly, but just like a weapon, the weapon can harm the user if not used properly. Our usage of Arabic words to describe Al Qaeda and AQI has not been wielded properly and has harmed us. In particular, our usage of *jihad* and *mujahedeen* adds legitimacy to our enemies IO campaign; portrays the U.S. as declaring war on Islam by declaring war on those who practice *jihad*; and communicates that the U.S. does not know what it is doing in IO.¹⁷

Jihadis or *jihadists* are terms constantly used by the media, government and military officials to describe AQI. That term was first used after 9/11 when the Bush administration sought to describe who our enemies were and also tried to reassure the world that our fight was not against Islam. Most Americans understand *jihad* to mean “holy war” waged by extremist Muslims (terrorists) against any that would oppose their faith. But, in reality, it has more meanings than this. There are two meanings for *jihad* that are accepted by traditional Muslims. The first and most important is the personal striving for excellence in the path of God.¹⁸ The second meaning is a war against any who would attack the Muslim community (*ummah*). Most Muslims interpret *jihad* as the responsibility for striving for excellence in the path of God and that *jihadis* strive for that excellence. By calling the terrorists *jihadis*, the U.S. is validating what AQI is doing. In essence, we are saying that they are striving to be in the path of God and this is exactly what AQI claims to be doing. Another cause of concern for the *ummah* is when U.S.

officials say the U.S. fight is with *jihadis*, in essence stating that our fight is with Islam.

Muslims feel that the U.S. is contradicting itself when it says that the fight isn't against Islam.

Another term that is consistently misused is *mujahedeen*. This term first came to the American vocabulary when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. A *mujahedeen* is one who participates in *jihad* or "holy war." But the problem is that when U.S. officials utilize this term to describe AQI we are communicating that the terrorists' actions are just because they are committing *jihad*.¹⁹ In essence we are condoning the actions that AQI takes against the U.S. and the Iraqi people. AQI's own IO campaign stresses that they are *mujahedeen* and when we address them that way, the U.S. reinforces their message.

Branding the enemy

Branding is using words to create an image or impression of something based upon the words used.²⁰ The American Marketing Association defines a brand as a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller and to differentiate them from other sellers."²¹ One of the key components to countering an opponent's branding campaign is to downplay the brand being promoted.

The U.S. political leadership has shown many good examples of downplaying the importance of an opponent in the past. For example, President Ronald Reagan opted not to elevate his opponent Muammar Qaddafi, the dictator of Libya. In his press conferences, President Reagan did not refer to Qaddafi by name, but rather referred to him as a "flaky barbarian." President Reagan also refused to refer to terrorist leaders by name in his press conferences. He believed that referring to them by name gave them status and branded them as a peer of the President.²² Another example is how President George W. Bush consistently referred to Senator John Kerry

as 'his opponent' during the 2004 presidential campaign debates.²³ By not referring to Senator Kerry by name, President Bush did not raise the stature of Senator Kerry to his level.

Unfortunately, the current U.S. government has not downplayed the importance of AQI opponents in Iraq. AQI branded Abu Musab-al Zarqawi as the defender of Islam (*mujahedeen*) and claimed that he was fighting to free Iraq from the U.S. forces (infidels). We played right into AQI's branding campaign for Abu Musab-al Zarqawi.²⁴ The senior levels of government consistently referred to Zarqawi and AQI as fighting a *jihad* against the infidels.

"We're dealing with some foreign terrorists, who are coming in from outside the country to fight what they believe is an extremely important *jihad*."²⁵

"They are absolutely committed to *jihad*, to killing infidels. We're at the top of the list."²⁶

"A handful of people, motivated by an intense desire to commit *jihad*, to kill the infidel - and we're the infidel."²⁷

"Because people like Zarqawi and their al Qaeda affiliates and their al Qaeda colleagues know that when Iraq is stable and peaceful and prosperous and democratic, that we will blow a huge hole in their sense of inevitability for this murderous *jihad* that they're trying to carry out. That's why Zarqawi and those people are in and if you think for one minute that if we weren't in Iraq, they are just going to be someplace drinking tea? No. They were going to be fighting the *jihad* somewhere."²⁸

By making those statements the senior leadership concurred with AQI and validated the branding that AQI had done for itself. The U.S. government inadvertently reinforced AQI's claim that they were fighting in a just cause for the Muslim world against an enemy of Islam and that Zarqawi was a righteous leader in that fight. While the U.S. message was intended to identify who we were fighting to the American people, in reality the message elevated Zarqawi's position and validated AQI's message that we were the infidels.

Use of Media and Combat Camera

The U.S. has had both successes and failures in utilizing combat camera to provide b-roll to the media in support of its IO campaign. For instance, during an operation in Baghdad that targeted an area nearby a mosque, U.S. forces killed sixteen terrorists. Because of the sensitive nature of the mission, no combat camera was present to film it. Right after the attack, the terrorist's IO went into effect and they dragged the sixteen bodies into a mosque and staged them to look like they had been executed. AQI then contacted the press and told them that U.S. forces had executed these men in the mosque.²⁹ Since there was no video footage to dispute this, the U.S. received a black eye in the Arab press and further alienated the local Iraqis. If combat camera had been present it could have mitigated the terrorist message.

An example when combat camera was used successfully was the Marines fight for Fallujah. When the Marines received fire from mosques, Col John Toolan, commanding the 1st Marine Regiment, made it his priority to get combat camera to videotape the enemy firing from the mosques.³⁰ The enemy was prevented from twisting the truth of what happened due to the video footage provided by combat camera when the Marines destroyed the enemy forces in the mosques.

Ridicule of the enemy

One of the more effective techniques in PSYOPS, if done correctly, is ridicule. If someone's laughed at, it is difficult to take them seriously. The U.S. has had several successes in OIF using ridicule. The first was a subtle form of ridicule when the United States showed Saddam Hussein, disheveled and disoriented, being given a medical exam like a vagrant off the

street. The world was riveted to this video, and in the author's opinion, it quickly took away Saddam's mystique and reduced him to the level of a common man.

Another stunning success was the U.S. release of unedited video of Zarqawi shooting a M249 SAW. Prior to release of this video, Zarqawi had built a mystical aura about himself when he was filmed wearing black uniforms, beheading hostages, and shooting American weapons he had claimed to capture. The video that AQI displayed on their website on April 25, 2006 was one of an authoritative and competent Zarqawi shooting a SAW, cheered on by his followers. It is obvious from watching the video that Zarqawi was proud of his ability to competently shoot the captured American weapon.

But on May 4, 2006, Maj Gen Lynch, a spokesperson for MNF-Iraq, showed both the original footage that the U.S. had captured earlier and the footage that AQI had displayed on their web site described above. Maj Gen Lynch also gave a narrative of what the viewer was seeing. In the unedited video Zarqawi is seen only able to fire single shots until he calls for help from his subordinates. One of his subordinates is seen clearing the weapon, and Zarqawi attempting to fire again, but his weapon is still jammed. Zarqawi, looking very puzzled motions for his subordinate to help him again. The SAW finally fires in automatic mode and this is the scene that is shown on the AQI website. After firing the weapon, Zarqawi puts the weapon down and walks away to his truck wearing American made sneakers (Reeboks). Maj Gen Lynch points this out and then shows Zarqawi's subordinates trying to pick up the SAW by the hot barrel and burning their hands. This obvious bumbling by his subordinate burning his hand and the comment by Gen Lynch that Zarqawi is wearing American sneakers drew a lot of laughter and played well in the Iraqi media.³¹ The Associated Press ran this story written by an Arab writer immediately following the May 4 press conference. "Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is shown

wearing American tennis shoes and unable to operate his automatic rifle in video released Thursday by the U.S. military as part of a propaganda war aimed at undercutting the image of the terrorist leader. Gen Lynch mocked al-Zarqawi as the previously unseen footage showed a smiling al-Qaeda leader first firing single shots from a U.S. made M-249 light machine gun. A frown creeps across al-Zarqawi's face as the weapon appears to jam. He looks at the rifle, confused, then summons another fighter."³² Not long after this press conference, Zarqawi was killed on June 8, 2006. It is possible that one of the reasons an informer gave information on his location was because of a lost respect for Zarqawi.¹

Chapter IV - Potential IO Strategies

The U.S. can create a more powerful IO campaign by: 1) using the enemy's language against him; 2) branding the enemy as *mufsidoon* committing *hirabah*; 3) making better use of the media (particularly the local Iraqi media); 4) training U.S. and Iraqi forces on how to interact with the media; and 5) ridiculing the enemy and making him an object of derision.²

Using the enemy's language against him

As noted earlier, the names *jihadis* and *mujahedeen* that we use to describe terrorists help build their stature. We need to find words in Arabic that describe the actions AQI is taking and that other Muslims can understand as evil. These words should be based in Islam and should be pointed first at diminishing the terrorists' stature and reducing the appeal Al Qaeda has for young Muslims. Secondly, these words should create uncertainty among AQI's recruits and its leaders

¹ This is the author's opinion and also the opinion expressed by other students in the 2008 Operations Elective class at USMC Command & Staff College.

² These are the author's thoughts on potential IO strategies.

as to whether they are truly acting in accordance with the tenets of Islam.³³ Two words that might achieve this effect are *mufsidoon* and *hirabah*.

A more accurate term to describe the terrorists' actions is *hirabah*, a word that has been around for over 1000 years in Muslim law.

"Since the concept of *jihad* comes from the root word *jahada* (to strive or struggle for self-betterment from an ethical-moral perspective) and that of *hirabah* comes from the root word *hariba* (to fight, to go to war or become enraged or angry), an etymological and theological examination of these words provides a valid framework through which the religious legitimacy of suicide bombings in today's global community can be analyzed...

To delve into a comparative study of these Islamic concepts is to expose how *hirabah* is being paraded by terrorist groups as *jihad*. By defining *hirabah* as *jihad*, such terrorist groups as al Qaeda and others promote their terrorist agendas by misleading young, religiously motivated and impressionable Muslims to believe that killing unarmed and non-combatant civilians are activities of *jihad*, and hence a ticket to paradise...

If activities of fear and terror associated with *hirabah* are used to define the meaning of *jihad* in hopes of recruiting Muslim youth to undertake suicide bombings and other criminal activities, Muslim theologians need to define the nature of what is happening to stop the hijacking of Islam by terrorists."³⁴

Hirabah closely parallels the English term of terrorism and is a term the majority of Muslims understand. *Hirabah* is how Muslims would describe the actions that the terrorists are using and is the most severely punished of all crimes in Islam.³⁵

The other term that more accurately describes what the terrorist are doing is *mufsidoon*. The definition of *mufsidoon* is that of an evil-doer who corrupts the teaching of the Koran for his own evil purposes.³⁶ AQI twists the meanings of the Koran to fit its purpose, and in corrupting the Koran, AQI is committing blasphemy (*tajdeef*). "*Tajdeef* designates the blasphemy that results from the waging of unholy warfare by evildoers. *Tajdeef* has traditionally been considered by Muslims as an act of apostasy punishable by death."³⁷ AQI's IO campaign frequently condemns the people they kill as *tajdeef*. But by showing images of children that they

kill, we can turn their own words against them. By the U.S. and Iraqi forces calling the terrorists *mufsidoon*, it also has the added benefit of justifying the killing of the *mufsidoon* in Islamic law.

Instead of using *mujahedeen* or *jihadists*, the U.S. government might start using *mufsidoon* and *hirabah* in their language describing the terrorists. Hopefully, as government personnel speak these words, the press will investigate their meanings and begin conversation in the Iraqi and Arab media as to the proper usage of those words. With relentless repetition and constant coverage by the media, those words may start to become mainstream within the media's vocabulary vice *jihadi* or *jihadist*.

The military also needs to begin calling the terrorists *mufsidoon*. The term is easy to learn and catchy, and it delivers a negative connotation. The young Marines and soldiers in Iraq should have no problem calling AQI that. After being repeated in the local Arab press time and time again it could help break AQI's domination of the word *jihad*. And by calling AQI *mufsidoon*, the military inherently offers a *Qur'anic* justification for killing the terrorists.

More importantly, we should encourage the Iraqi forces working with us to start using this language to describe the terrorists. It will have a greater impact coming from them since they are Muslim. The U.S. government can also encourage the Iraqi leadership to start talking about AQI in this manner. The U.S. will have achieved its goal in PSYOPs when Imams discourage young Muslims from being terrorists and say, "Do not wage *hirabah*, do not become *mufsidoon*, do not commit *tajdeef*, do nothing that would cause Allah to cast you in *Jahannam* (hell)." ³⁸

Branding the enemy

To defeat the *mufsidoon* in Iraq, the military can learn some lessons from the civilian industry in the power of branding. The business world effectively exercises branding all the time. Several examples of branding are marketing campaigns for products such as Nike, Mercedes, and VIAGRA. Each of these names has been successful in consistently promoting a message to the media that stresses the quality of their product.

Branding can be a double edged sword. Giving a name to terrorists such as *jihadist* or *mujahedeen* brands them as legitimate and can have the opposite effect of what is desired. The U.S. government made a mistake when they started using that terminology because it legitimized Al Qaeda in the eyes of Muslims. Every time a terrorist is called a mujahedeen or jihadist it aids the terrorists branding campaign to cast them in the light as the defenders of Islam and being good Muslims striving for good.

The U.S. senior government officials need to refrain from calling the terrorist leaders by name. By doing so, the U.S. government helps to elevate a terrorist and brands them as equal to a legitimate governmental leader. An example of this was how the intense interest placed on Osama bin Laden by the U.S. government helped build him up to be a super terrorist. A more appropriate response would have been to brand him as a *mufsidoon* and not to refer to him by name.

To effectively brand the terrorist we need to stop using the words that are constantly used by government and military personnel: "agitators, anti-Americans, anti-Iraqi forces, former Ba'athists, Ba'athist holdovers, Ba'athist remnants, *fedayeen*, former regime members, guerrillas, insurgents, martyrs, *mujahidin*, regime loyalists, resistance fighters, Sunni extremists, and of course, *jihadis* and *jihadists*."³⁹ Terms such as these give terrorists legitimacy and while many are militarily accurate, these terms still do not vilify them. The U.S. and the Iraqi

government needs to call them *mufsidoon* and consistently vilify and demonize them by showing images of AQI violence, talking to the press in Iraq immediately after the violence, and stress that the *mufsidoon* did this. Much of this has already happened in the Al Anbar province in Iraq. The Sunni sheiks have seen the excessive violence of AQI and have decided to rise up against them. By constant and relentless branding we can change the perception in which AQI is viewed both in Iraq and the world into *mufsidoon* that are committing *hirabah*.

Using the local media

The U.S. military can make better use of the local Iraqi media, Al Jazeera, and El Arabiya. The majority of Iraqis and the Arab world watch Al Jazeera and El Arabiya.⁴⁰ It is imperative that U.S. forces leverage Al Jazeera and El Arabiya to get out their message. A successful IO campaign cannot be waged unless the Arab media is involved in the process.

Immediately after a terrorist attack, the U.S. needs to ensure that local media is on hand to video the aftermaths of the attack. Preferably, Iraqi forces on the scene need to be the ones to address the media first with an accurate story of what happened and stress the loathsome actions of the *mufsidoon*. U.S. leaders down to the squad leader level also need to be trusted to talk to the local media and reinforce the Iraqi forces message about the terrorists without having to wait for higher headquarters approval. In the IO battle in Iraq, the first word in the press is typically the one that is believed. The U.S. and Iraqi forces can NOT afford to let the *mufsidoon* get their message out first. It is also a mistake to try to suppress the images of the carnage. Our sensitivity to releasing pictures and videos of AQI carnage needs to stop; rather let the Arab media show the carnage and assign the blame to the *mufsidoon*.

People who are grieving are particularly susceptible to messages that vilify the terrorists. They will also be prone to utilize the same terms (*mufsidoon*) heard on local media to describe

the terrorists. During press conferences U.S. forces must talk about the attacks, particularly stressing the innocent children and people who have been killed. As soon as possible after the attack, PSYOPs personnel can print up flyers with pictures of the scenes that drives home the point that *mufsidoon* were responsible for the carnage. The flyers should ask for Iraqi help in bringing the evildoers to justice.⁴¹

U.S. forces can hire local Iraqis with media experience to conduct media surveys within their area and determine what media sources the local Iraqis view the most and then aggressively work with that media. The local Iraqis can also work the local media and get them to come to press conferences and encourage positive coverage of Iraqi and U.S. forces. The key to positive coverage is that the local media *trust* the Iraqi and U.S. forces to give them *accurate* and *timely* information.

Combat camera is a valuable asset that can be utilized to counter the *mufsidoon* propaganda. Just as the terrorists film their operations (executions, attacks on U.S. and Iraqi forces, VBIED, etc), the U.S. needs to get video coverage of any operation that could be exploited by the enemy. This video is essential in case AQI puts out false information about our operations.

Senior leadership must trust their subordinates to talk to the media and tell their story. Reporters would rather get their information from the forces on scene than from a press conference at higher headquarters. The Iraqi forces also can be trained and trusted to talk with the media. While Marines have done a decent job getting Iraqi forces in front of the camera, more work needs to be done in this aspect.

A critical element for effective use of the media is to be truthful. There is a fine line between using the media for information operation and manipulating the truth. Right now the

U.S. military has a good reputation with the media for telling the truth. For that to continue Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) *cannot* be involved in deception operations and should not even be briefed to what the deception plan is. The U.S. never should put their PAOs in a position where they are asked a question and either mislead or evade the question. The easiest way to avoid this is to make sure that PAOs are never briefed on deception plans.

Training U.S./Iraqi forces in IO operations and talking to the media

Most senior officers that have lectured at Command & Staff College this year have stated that we are doing a poor job with our IO campaign. A critical element of the PSYOPS portion of IO is getting word out through the media. It can be argued that the IO portion of OIF is critical to success, but officers receive very little training in IO or on how to talk with the media. If the military says that IO is important, we need to give IO the attention it needs during our training time in formal schools and at the unit level. IO is only given a cursory run-through at TBS and EWS. At USMC Command & Staff College there is no formal instruction on IO. The only knowledge of it for most students is from four exercises throughout the year. Although an IO elective is offered, there still needs to be at least a week dedicated to the subject. It is critical that field grade officers understand IO and do not have to learn on the job.

While Marines are given the obligatory Public Affairs briefs prior to deployment and do reasonably well in dealing with the media, improvements can be made in their media training. Role players that really act like media need to play the part of reporters during exercises. Marines need to be filmed talking to the media and then given feedback about their messages and how they contributed to the IO effort. Marines should also be trained to look for opportunities that can create television footage (b-roll) to discredit the *mufsidoon*. In particular, Marines and

Iraqi forces can be trained on the IO message and can take video cameras with them on patrol with the intent of getting video that helps the IO effort. If Marines can get footage of AQI carnage after attacks, those images should be rapidly passed to the media along with the IO messages that vilify the *mufsideon*. The best credibility in Iraq comes from savvy Iraqi forces that are able to communicate to the media and to accurately tell the truth of what is happening. Field grade officers need to receive individualized media training that consists of at least three one hour sessions that include being filmed and then receiving feedback as to how well they communicated their messages.

Ridiculing the enemy

Ridicule can reduce the legitimacy of a group, reduce the fear of that group, reduce their standing in the eyes of the Iraqis, and potentially take away their greatest weapon - the claim that they are acting justly for Muslims. U.S. and Iraqi forces can be trained to look for opportunities to gather stories, pictures, and video that can be used to ridicule terrorists. As demonstrated with the Zarqawi example, ridicule can be a powerful tool that the U.S. and Iraqi forces should continue to use in their struggle with AQI.

Chapter V - Conclusion

The *mufsideon* have had a great amount of success with their IO efforts throughout 2003-2006. They continue to make good use of the media and exploit opportunities to distribute their PSYOPS messages. They are vulnerable to PSYOPSs from the U.S. if the U.S. can capitalize on this.

The U.S. has had success in their IO campaign in Iraq, but much more can be done to further this effort. The effective usage of the Arabic language to brand the terrorists and also to ridicule them can have a strong impact on the terrorists' credibility. Words have critical meanings and the U.S. IO effort in Iraq can make better usage of words to vilify the *mufsidoon*.

Of primary importance is the training of U.S. forces in IO. The U.S. needs to do a better job training the U.S. and Iraqi forces in Iraq who will execute IO. The Marine Corps has started to address this in Command & Staff College by offering an IO elective to some students. Better results can occur if there is a one week long IO block offered during the year at Command and Staff College. The power of a strong IO message integrated with effective usage of the media can help to win the long fight ahead of us in Iraq. The key to a strong IO effort will continue to be effective training and usage of the media.

Notes

¹ Kenneth Roth, "The Wrong Way to Combat Terrorism," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Summer / Fall 2007, 116.

² Daniel Kimmage and Kathleen Ridolfo, "Iraqi Insurgent Media: The War of Ideas and Images," (Washington D.C.: RFE/RL, Inc., 2007), 62.

³ Ibid, 60.

⁴ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/25/AR2007062501847.html>

⁵ <http://www.jubaonline.org>

⁶ <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/02/22896c39-741d-4f69-980a-6602e5162912.html>.

⁷ Kimmage and Ridolfo, "Iraqi Insurgent Media," , 70.

⁸ Ibid, 70.

⁹ Ibid, 57.

¹⁰ Dr. Steven Livingston lecture at USMC C&S College IO course 7 Mar 2008.

¹¹ www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/03/27/terror/main/442881.shtml Donald Rumsfeld

¹² Colonel Ralph O. Baker, "The Decisive Weapon: A Brigade Combat Team Commander's Perspective on Information Operations," *Military Review*, May-June 2006, 16.

¹³ General Zinni conversation at USMC C&S college

¹⁴ Baker, "The Decisive Weapon," 17.

¹⁵ Ibid, 18.

¹⁶ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, undated), 377.

¹⁷ Michael J. Waller, *Fighting the War of Ideas Like a Real War* (Washington D.C.: Institute of World Politics Press, 2007), 53-54.

¹⁸ Douglass E. Streusand and Harry Tunnell IV, "Choosing Words Carefully: Language to help fight Islamic Terrorism," (Washington D.C.: National Defense University, 2006), 3.

¹⁹ Ibid, 4.

²⁰ Christy Stravolo, President of Stravolo Media Services, LLC, Interview with author in Stafford, VA, Dec 14, 2007.

²¹ About.com, <http://www.marketing.about.com/cs/brandmktg/a/whatisbranding.html> 6 January 2008).

²² Ibid, 81.

²³ Waller, *Fighting the War of Ideas Like a Real War*, 82.

²⁴ Ibid, 63.

²⁵ The White House, "Interview of the National Security Advisor by KXAS-TV, Dallas, Texas," 10 November 2003. Emphasis added.

²⁶ The White House, 17 September 2004. Emphasis added.

²⁷ The White House, "Vice President and Mrs. Cheney's Q&A in Johnstown, Pennsylvania," 18 October 2004. Emphasis added.

²⁸ The White House, "Remarks by National Security Advisor Dr. Condoleezza Rice to the Reagan Lecture," 26 February 2004.

²⁹ LTG Chiarrelli lecture to C&S College.

³⁰ Major James M. Issacs, "The Media's Effect on Combat Operations in Operation Iraqi Freedom: Perspectives of Commanders," (Virginia, USMC Command & Staff College, 2007), 13.

³¹ Waller, *Fighting the War of Ideas Like a Real War*, 106.

³² Tarek Al-Tablawi, "Video Shows Al-Zarqawi Fumbling with Rifle," *Associated Press*, May 4, 2006, updated 6:53 p.m. Eastern.

³³ Waller, *Fighting the War of Ideas Like a Real War*, 65.

³⁴ Layla Sein, "Editorial," Association of Muslim Social Scientists *AMSS Bulletin* 3, no. 4 (2002).

³⁵ Sayyid M. Syeed, letter to Jim Guirard, cited by Guirard, "Properly Condemning the al Qaeda Blasphemy," *The American Muslim*, April 21, 2003.

³⁶ Streusand and Tunnel, "Choosing Words Carefully," 6.

³⁷ Waller, *Fighting the War of Ideas Like a Real War*, 72.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 72.

³⁹ Waller, *Fighting the War of Ideas Like a Real War*, 90-91.

⁴⁰ Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., "Al Jazeera," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, 30 December 2006, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Jazeera#Viewership (27 December 2007).

⁴¹ Baker, "The Decisive Weapon," 28.

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