USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

DEFEATING THE LOGIC OF ISLAMIST TERRORISM

by

Colonel Wing Kai Chan
Singapore Armed Forces

Dr. Gabriel Marcella
Project Adviser

U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

Report Documentation Page		*Form Approved* *OMB No. 0704-0188*

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE **30 MAR 2007**	2. REPORT TYPE **Strategy Research Project**		3. DATES COVERED **00-00-2006 to 00-00-2007**
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE **Defeating the Logic of Islamist Terrorism**			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
			5b. GRANT NUMBER
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S) **Wing Chan**			5d. PROJECT NUMBER
			5e. TASK NUMBER
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **U.S. Army War College,Carlisle Barracks,Carlisle,PA,17013-5050**			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT **Approved for public release; distribution unlimited**			
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES			
14. ABSTRACT **See attached.**			
15. SUBJECT TERMS			

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES **20**	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT **unclassified**	b. ABSTRACT **unclassified**	c. THIS PAGE **unclassified**			

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std Z39-18

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Colonel Wing Kai Chan

TITLE: Defeating the Logic of Islamist Terrorism

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 08 March 2007   WORD COUNT: 5766   PAGES: 16

KEY TERMS: Middle East, Battle of Ideas, Hearts and Minds

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

War is fought in the dual realms of physical and psychological battleground. In the global war on terror, victory entails winning both the battle of arms and battle of ideas. Physical destruction of the terrorist organization is an essential but insufficient condition to defeat the Islamist terrorist ideology. The war must be waged at the level where it matters, by attacking the logic of Islamist terrorism, by exposing its religious pretensions, and by undermining its popular appeal, recognizing that terrorism as a method of choice is a double-edged sword for the extremists. This internal struggle would have to be waged by the moderate Muslims. While non-Muslims have no real standing in this debate, adjustments to U.S. approach in conducting its foreign policy in the Middle East would be an important enabler to the efforts of the moderate Muslims, by improving U.S. image and by bringing about tangible changes to Muslim societies in the region. The battle of ideas is concurrently a battle of will and resolve. The current partisan disharmony in the U.S. backyard must be reconciled. In the marathon to defeat the logic of Islamist terrorism, unity of purpose and effort are the prerequisites for success.

DEFEATING THE LOGIC OF ISLAMIST TERRORISM

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the United States launched a full-scale war campaign against Al Qaeda and its associated movements. Through a multinational and multi-dimensional approach, the efforts led by the United States made significant strides in containing the terrorist organizations, seriously constraining their ability to operate and survive. However, despite all the successes, the danger of catastrophic terrorism continues to be real and present. The long-term nature of the threat is well understood, but what is unclear is whether the long-term strategy for the global war on terror is adequately framed to counter and defeat the ideology of the Islamist terrorism.

What Al Qaeda symbolizes is the rise of the Islamist terrorist movement, an extreme manifestation of Islamic fundamentalism. The movement aims to establish a worldwide Islamic caliphate, and, to achieve that objective, uses violence against innocent civilians. This paper submits that defeating the Islamist terrorist movement requires winning both the battle of arms and battle of ideas. Crippling the Al Qaeda organization is an essential but insufficient step. The strategy to defeat the Islamist ideology must transcend the physical realm and attack the logic of the Al Qaeda-inspired movement. The true battleground is in the hearts and minds of Muslims, and the object in contention is the legitimacy of leadership and the support of the populace.

The strategy to defeat the Islamist terrorist movement calls for four essential elements. Firstly, defeating the Islamist ideology requires the removal of its popular appeal amongst Muslims by exposing its religious pretensions, recognizing that terrorism as a method of choice is a double-edged sword to the terrorist movement. Secondly, a compelling alternative vision must be painted to galvanize the Muslim community and to counter the Islamist ideology, bearing in mind the limitations and pitfalls of the policy to promote democracy in the Middle East. Thirdly, for the United States to play an effective role as a catalyst to stimulate and support the moderate Muslims, U.S. public image and perception within the Muslim world must be improved. Finally, unity of purpose and effort in the U.S. home front is a critical part of the effort to sustain the long war against the Islamist movement.

The Global Battle of Ideas

War is fought in the dual paradigms of physical and psychological battleground. As stated in the September 2006 U.S. *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, at the strategic level, the war against the Islamist terrorist movement is "both a battle of arms and a battle of ideas." While homeland security and offensive military actions are important, they are by

themselves insufficient to defeat terrorism.[1] Recognizing the importance of countering the terrorist ideology, the United States has increased the funding for public diplomacy since 9/11, reversing the trend of declining emphasis of the 1990s.[2] On the other hand, the significance of psychological warfare is also not lost to Al Qaeda, the leading organization of the Islamist terrorist movement. Besides carrying out terrorist attacks, Al Qaeda has been conducting sophisticated public relations and media campaigns to elicit support from the Muslim community and, at the same time, strike fear into the hearts of innocent civilians in order to wear down the will of its opponents.

Strategic battles are fought in the realm of ideas. Offensive efforts to destroy and disrupt the terrorist networks and defensive efforts to strengthen homeland security are but tactical battles of the war. While tactical actions are important, they are insufficient for winning the war. In dealing with the Islamist terrorist movement, whose main effort is psychological, successes in the physical realm will remain short-lived. Unless the logic underlying the movement is defeated, conventional wisdom shows that even if its leader, Osama Bin Laden, is killed and Al Qaeda destroyed, the Islamist terrorist movement will in all likelihood continue to retain the capacity to reproduce itself and spin a whole new series of terrorist networks in the Middle East and the Islamic world. Hence, the center of gravity of the conflict resides in the hearts and minds of the Muslim populace, and the main battleground is the global information space of public discourse where perceptions, opinions, and behaviors are shaped, influenced, and controlled.

Assessing the War on Terror

Physically, the United States-led efforts to disrupt and destroy the terrorist networks have largely been successful. Although Al Qaeda and the terrorists it inspired have continued to attack across the world since 9/11, the April 2006 U.S. *National Intelligence Estimate* (NIE) assessed that sustained counterterrorism efforts have seriously damaged the leadership of Al Qaeda and disrupted its operations. The offensives removed terrorist sanctuaries, disrupted their finances, killed and captured key operatives, broke up terrorist cells in America and other nations, and managed to stop new attacks before they were carried out.[3] An Al Qaeda document found on the body of one of its leaders killed in Iraq, Abu Musab Zarqawi, also confirmed the successes achieved by the counterterrorism efforts thus far.[4]

However, progress in the battle of ideas is mixed. The April 2006 NIE assessed that the Islamist terrorist movement, fueled by anti-United States sentiment in the Islamic world, is spreading and adapting to counterterrorism efforts. The estimate noted that the movement is now decentralized and diffused and new networks and cells are increasingly likely to emerge.[5]

The survey conducted by the *Pew Global Attitudes Project* in 13 countries, including the United States, from March 31 to May 14, 2006, also revealed worsening Muslim opinions about the West and its people by overwhelming margins. However, on the positive side, most Muslim countries surveyed showed a general decline in support for terrorism, a fall in confidence for Osama Bin Laden, and a drop in the percentage of Muslims saying suicide bombings and violence against civilian targets can be justified when used to defend Islam against its enemies.[6]

The assessments of the NIE and the Pew Research Center survey reflected both challenges and opportunities. Firstly, the findings revealed the critical vulnerability of the ideology of Islamist extremism, i.e. the ability of the movement to carry the Muslim ground in the name of Islam. Secondly, the findings also showed that the center of gravity for sustainable success in countering extremism lies in winning over the hearts and minds within the Muslim world. However, to defeat the Islamist terrorist movement, one must first understand clearly the true nature of the conflict. As pointed out by Zbigniew Brzezinski, how the conflict is defined is more than just an intellectual exercise but has an impact on what the responses will be, and different responses bring different repercussions.[7] What is needed is a hardheaded objective evaluation of the nature of the conflict, not blinded by biased emotions fueled by fiery rhetoric from both sides, or by the political niceties presented in the name of multicultural political correctness.

Understanding the Context of the Conflict

The rise of the Islamist terrorist movement must be viewed in the context of contemporary revival of Islam during the 1970s and 1980s. Previously marginalized, Islam as a political force has assumed greater prominence as Muslim societies struggle to cope with the challenges of modernity. One of the manifestations is the increased appeal to religion for legitimacy and for popular support. Unfortunately, the rise of political Islam is superimposed on a political landscape of widespread discontent in the Middle East. Poor governance in many Muslim societies gives rise to corruption, unequal distribution of wealth, and widespread poverty. Rising aspirations of an increasingly young, urban, and educated population are often met with disappointment and frustration with the lack of opportunities. All these create fertile ground for the growth of extremism.

The Muslim world is non-monolithic and there is no unified position within the Muslim community on coping with modernity. Religious debates in the Middle East are further compounded by the complex geopolitics of the region. Diverse paths of organizing polities and societies are pursued, ranging from monarchies to secular governments. At one end of the

spectrum are the modernist reformers who seek to adopt western constitutional democracy model, which emphasizes the separation of state and religion.[8] At the other end are the traditionalists, represented by the Ikhwan Muslimin or the Islamic Brotherhood, who look back at history to the glorious past of an Islamic caliphate. The traditionalists' belief is that "a return to Islam – that is, to the fundamentals: the Quran, the life of the Prophet, and the early Islamic community – offered the model for Islamic reform."[9] The West may be quick to denounce the absurdity of establishing an Islamic caliphate, but one has to recognize that while terrorism is being rejected, the idea of a glorious Islamic world retains powerful appeal amongst Muslims.

The Islamist terrorist movement, as epitomized by Al Qaeda, brings those ideas expounded by the traditionalists to the extreme, and resorts to violence against civilians, Muslims and non-Muslim alike, as a way to amplify their voice while they hijack and dominate the debates. Two points concerning the Islamist terrorist movement must be borne in mind. Firstly, despite the religious pretensions to justify violence in the name of religion, terrorism is not inherent in Islam. Secondly, Islamist terrorists are a minority in the larger community of Muslims whose reputation is grossly inflated by the dramatic attacks launched on 9/11, and should not be given more credence than they deserve. Acknowledging these two points is not equivalent to dismissing the role of religion and the threat posed by the terrorists in the conflict, but to put the Islamist terrorist movement and Al Qaeda into context and perspective.

<u>Winning the Religious Debate</u>

Like all significant ideological movements, Islamist terrorism is subject to the same strategic need to maintain popular support. As such, the war against the Islamist terrorist movement must be waged at the level where it matters, i.e. to undermine and eventually remove the popular support for the terrorist movement. As Zawahiri, one of Al Qaeda's key leaders, once admitted, 'In the absence of popular support, the Islamic mujahideen movement would be crushed in the shadows."[10] It is also instructive to note that recruitment into the Islamist terrorist movement was done through social bond more than propaganda, with friendship accounting for "68 percent of the recruitment, kinship (directly or through marriage) 20 percent, and "discipleship" a mere 10 percent."[11] Therefore, one should recognize that the long-term threat is not Al Qaeda per se, but the continued spread of the Islamist extremism ideas. The side that eventually prevails will be the one that can effectively carry the majority Muslim ground with its arguments.

At the strategic level, Al Qaeda leadership routinely quoted verses in the Quran to justify their actions. As observed in a Congressional Research Services report, "Al Qaeda's leaders

believe that regular attempts to characterize Al Qaeda's actions as defensive and religiously sanctioned will increase tolerance of and support for their broader ideological program."[12] Hence, terrorist acts are couched under the idea of Jihad, and suicide bombings are euphemistically described as martyrdom. Osama Bin Laden has also echoed Huntington's thesis of a clash of civilizations by characterizing the conflict with the United States as a new crusade led by America against the Islamic nations. The sole intent and purpose is to portray the Islamist terrorist movement as the defender against the onslaught of western crusaders, for which people within the Islamic community are obliged to unite and fight.

The rhetoric of the Islamists may seem effective, but their constructs are built on thin ground. It has not always been easy for Al Qaeda to win the arguments as shown in a document captured from Al Qaeda, which revealed the success of the allied media campaign in portraying terrorism as harmful to the Muslim populations and in magnifying the terrorists' mistakes.[13] Terrorism is a double-edged sword to Al Qaeda, and the tactic that defines the existence of the Islamist terrorist movement is also the same death knell that will eventually signals the demise of the organization. To make their point and to exert their leadership, terrorist organizations must transcend mere rhetoric and demonstrate the ability to orchestrate substantive terrorist strikes. However, such attacks also run the potential risk of alienating large segment of the Muslim population.

Therefore, it is important that such religious pretensions not be left unanswered. In order not to allow Al Qaeda get away with bogus religious arguments, all acts of terrorism committed by the Islamists must similarly be denounced using the teachings of the Quran by Muslims themselves. One of the laments often heard from non-Muslims, especially amongst those who hold the view that the rise of Islam will fundamentally be violent, is that moderate Muslims are not forthcoming in speaking out against the radicals. The absence of a moderate voice is often interpreted to indicate either a lack of courage or the majority actually supports the radicals. To be fair, many prominent moderate Muslim leaders did speak up against the extremists.[14] However, the criticism seems oddly muted, which led the U.S. Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Karen Hughes, to lament the "lacking in our international response to terrorism: the concerted moral outrage of everyday citizens of every faith and country."[15]

On the other hand, comments or responses from the West were not always helpful. Fueled by the prevalent anti-U.S. sentiment in Muslim countries, and often dramatized by reporting in the mass media, there is a tendency among some people in the West to view fundamentalism as an inherent feature of Islam. Such belief falls right into the traps of the

Islamist terrorist design to portray the conflict as a religious struggle between Islam and Christianity. Another example is the *Jyllands-Posten* Muhammad cartoons controversy that began on September 17, 2005, when the Danish newspaper *Politiken* ran an article under the headline *"Dyb angst for kritik af islam"* ("Profound fear of criticism of Islam").[16] Yet another unfortunate event was the controversy that arose from a lecture delivered by Pope Benedict XVI on 12 September 2006 at the University of Regensburg in Germany entitled "Faith, Reason and the University — Memories and Reflections." Even though the Pope's alleged insulting mischaracterization of Islam was eventually clarified, the episode further reinforced the negative opinion Muslims hold against the western world.

At the end, the religious debate will predominantly be an internal contest within the Muslim community where non-Muslims rightfully have no standing to participate. However, given the global nature of the Jihad waged by the Islamist terrorist movement and the growing Muslim population in many non-Islamic countries, non-Muslims do have the duty to lend support to the moderate Muslims. At the minimum, what non-Muslims can do is to be sensitive to Muslim religious and cultural sentiments and avoid creating unnecessary controversies that can cause resentment. Proactively, efforts should be invested to promote inter-faith dialogues that engage in two dimensions: "the vertical, which is about fathoming the different ways people understand and worship God, and the horizontal, which involves developing coalitions of the righteous across the religious spectrum to work together toward the betterment of society."[17] Combating extremism requires both Muslims and non-Muslims to work hand-in-hand, and unity can only be achieved when there is mutual understanding and appreciation.

Offering a Viable Alternative Vision

Debunking the Islamists' religious pretensions alone is insufficient. Although the vision of a global Islamic caliphate is not even a remote possibility, the dream continues to inspire people to action. To counter that, an alternative vision that is equally compelling must be painted. The Bush administration recognizes this strategic imperative, and, in response to the Islamist ideology, put forth the "freedom agenda," to promote "freedom and human dignity as alternatives to the terrorists' perverse vision of oppression and totalitarian rule." As outlined in the U.S. Department of State's strategy for public diplomacy, the three strategic objectives are:

- Offer people throughout the world a positive vision of hope and opportunity that is rooted in America's belief in freedom, justice, opportunity and respect for all;

- Isolate and marginalize the violent extremists; confront their ideology of tyranny and hate. Undermine their efforts to portray the west as in conflict

with Islam by empowering mainstream voices and demonstrating respect for Muslim cultures and contributions; and

- Foster a sense of common interests and common values between Americans and people of different countries, cultures and faiths throughout the world.[18]

Based on the assumption that democratic countries do not go to war with one another, the strategy envisions advancing "effective democracies as the long-term antidote to the ideology of terrorism." However, for the "freedom agenda" to succeed, two important questions must be addressed upfront. Firstly, can democracy be imposed? Secondly, is Islam and democracy compatible?

Whether democracy can be transplanted to a region long devoid of it is an ongoing debate. Developments in Iraq and Afghanistan are often cited as positive examples of how democracy brings benefits to the countries and to U.S. interests in the region. Without a doubt, the removal of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban regime, and the establishment of democratic governments have transformed Iraq and Afghanistan, which were previously hostile to the United States. However, more than just having regular elections, effective democracy implies the ability of governments to "exercise effective sovereignty and maintain order within their own borders, protect independent and impartial systems of justice, punish crime, embrace the rule of law, and resist corruption." The conditions also include limiting the "reach of government," and "protecting the institutions of civil society."[19] Besides reforms and institution building, a fundamental basis for democracy to take root is that there be rule of law and state monopoly on the use of force. Unfortunately, such preconditions for effective democracy are not necessarily mature in the Middle East. The study carried out by Amaney Jamal shows that investment in human capital development in the Arab world, a key step to promoting democracy, "has been declining in terms of relative per capita gross domestic product and levels of education when compared to the rest of the world."[20] For effective democracy to take root, long-term commitment to laying the institutional foundations is important, and such fundamental changes cannot be achieved overnight.

In addition, the United States should also recognize that imposing democracy where the necessary preconditions are lacking can backfire on U.S. interests. A good example is the legislative victory of Hamas, an organization that does not recognize the state of Israel and calls for an Islamized Palestinian state, in the January 2006 Palestinian legislative election. As noted in a Congressional Research Services report, a Palestinian Authority "dominated by a democratically elected Hamas is uncharted diplomatic territory for the U.S. government and international community."[21] The United States has long regarded Hamas as a terrorist

organization and held the policy position that there should be no dialogue or relationship with the organization. Since Hamas is popularly elected and represents the will of the Palestinian, should not the United States recognize and work with Hamas? The continual refusal to deal with a democratically elected Hamas will only reinforce the perception of a biased and self serving U.S. foreign policy, further undermining U.S. credibility in the Muslim world.

The discourse on the compatibility of Islam and democracy is equally contentious. On one hand is the argument that Islam is diametrically opposed to democracy because it does not recognize the separation of religion and state, while democracy, as defined by its western conception, emphasizes secularism. In addition, as John Esposito noted, the "political realities of the Muslim world have not been conducive to the development of democratic traditions and institutions," as post colonial governments dominated by military officers and monarchs were concerned with the impact of increased political participation and democratic institutions have on their power base.[22] On the other hand, however, there are living examples of viable democracy thriving in states dominated by Muslims in Southeast Asia. For many years, the moderate model of Islam in democratic countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia has demonstrated the capacity for successful transition to modernity, and for peaceful coexistence with other religions. Brought in by traders from the Middle East, Islam in Southeast Asia had successfully accommodated and reconciled with existing Hindu and Buddhist traditions and cultures, which created a moderate brand of Islam which is "basically tolerant, peaceful, and smiling."[23] Despite the resurgence of Islam that has prompted the recent move towards a more fundamentalist interpretation of the Quran, the moderate brand of Islam in Southeast Asia continues to hold sway. The geopolitical context in Southeast Asia and the Middle East may be different, but the model of Islam and democracy in Southeast Asia does demonstrate that Islam and democracy are not necessarily opposed.

In order for the "freedom agenda" to be a viable model to counter the Islamist ideology, one should accept the fact that the democratic models in the Middle East will not match exactly the concept of democracy as defined in the west. While values such as freedom, liberty, and human dignity may be universal, the perception of how they are manifested is contextual. What may seem to be repressive policies from a western liberal standpoint may represent freedom from a conservative Middle Eastern perspective. Conversely, freedom of expression as seen in western society often appears as being irresponsible and decadence in the eyes of the people in the Middle East. Therefore, one should be mindful of the pitfalls when pushing for the "freedom agenda." In the best case, the rally cries of freedom against extremism merely fall on less than receptive ears. In the worst case, they will be interpreted as propaganda behind

sinister western imperialism to dominate and exploit resources in the Middle East. The extent such criticism can impede the "freedom agenda" will depend on how much the United States is being trusted, which, in turn, is a result of how the United States is being perceived in the region.

<u>Improving Public Image and Perception</u>

To be effective in the Muslim world, the United States must take positive steps to improve its public image amongst Muslims. The United States is judged not just for what it does or fails to do, but for how others perceive it.[24] In a conflict with a non-state, transnational adversary, who draws its support and power from the people, public opinion matters. For a start, U.S. policymakers need to be careful with the choice of words. Hurling unproductive rhetoric to demonize the enemy or states at odds with U.S. policy should be discontinued. Derogative terms such as axis of evil, rogue states, etc. make one feels good but serve no real purpose. Instead, by whipping up inflammatory emotions, they often obscure the ability of the mind to analyze objectively. A distinction should also be made between terrorist acts vis-à-vis labeling a country as a terrorist state, bearing in mind that such labels not only tarnish the image of the government but also in a broad brush tar all the people of that country. Naming the initial U.S. response after 9/11 "Operation Enduring Crusade" and using offensive terms such as "Islamic Fascism" are indicative of a lack of cultural sensitivity. These are value-laden words capable of evoking deep felt emotions. By being sensitive, prudent, and resisting the temptation of a feel-good rhetoric shouting match with the enemy, the United States will be able to maintain a certain level of moral high ground and also avoid falling victim to its own rhetoric excesses in the event of a policy reversal.

Secondly, the United States must begin to adopt a more balanced approach in conducting its foreign policy in the Middle East. "Your actions scream so loud in my ears that I cannot hear what you are saying;" the preceding quotation from Emerson aptly applies to describe the sentiment within the Muslim community with regards to U.S. policy in the Middle East. The dominant view among Muslims is that "the United States ignores the interests of their countries in deciding its international policies. This view is as dominant in Turkey (74%), a NATO ally, as it is in Lebanon (77%)," and large majority of Muslims polled said that the West does not show respect and concern for Muslim sensitivities and welfare.[25] A recent example is the July 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah conflict when the United States was seen to be reluctant in restraining the massive Israeli bombardment of Lebanon even though U.S. diplomatic effort was in full swing trying bring the conflict to an end through the international conference in Rome. The

fact is that in the Middle East, people make little distinction between the United States and Israel. They have totally identified the United States with Israeli policies, with practical consequences for the United States.

Moreover people find it incredible that a country as powerful as the United States was unable to do what it wanted to do. In light of these realities, the approach to a balanced foreign policy does not suggest compromising on U.S. national interests or appeasing those countries that are in disagreement with the United States. The key is to show empathy to differing view points and demonstrate fairness in settling differences. While there is no quick fix to the complex Middle East geopolitical challenges, a balanced yet firm and consistent diplomatic approach will certainly help to improve U.S. image, credibility, and standing in the region.

Thirdly, in the long war against Islamist terrorist movement, the United States stands a better chance of gaining greater support, both moral and real, by leveraging on international and regional organizations. The war on terror requires a concerted global effort where the United States, as the sole superpower, has an unavoidable leadership role. In response to the September 11 terrorist attacks in continental United States, the Bush administration took great pain to forge a broad based coalition in launching the war on terror. The result was impressive as the coalition included not just United States' traditional allies, NATO countries, Japan, and Australia, it also involves unexpected partners such as China and Russia, as well as Pakistan and India.[26] On the other hand, the U.S. decision to proceed with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 without securing a UN resolution created immense difficulties for the United States both domestic and abroad. Obviously leading a broad based coalition requires sophistication in diplomatic skills to balance and align diverse interests and opinions. At the operational level, maintaining unity of effort is a real challenge, and one should be prepared for difficulties in decision making and compromises. Nevertheless, as terrorism "achieves its goal not through its acts but through the response to its acts," the moral high ground that comes along with international support is an important weapon that can effectively cut through the Islamists' "moral" and religious pretensions.[27]

Finally, beyond words and image, the United States should exercise its enormous leverages in the Middle East as the largest foreign aid provider to bring about positive changes. There is a need to ensure that the bulk of foreign aid is channeled towards internal development and creation of employment opportunities. Although members of the Al Qaeda are not necessarily drawn from the impoverished parts of the population, grievances at this level give reasons for Al Qaeda to exploit for publicity and recruitment purposes. The impact of shaping public opinion through bringing tangible changes should not be underestimated. A perfect

example was the turn around of Indonesian opinion in favor of the United States because of the humanitarian assistance rendered in the aftermath of the Tsunami disaster in December 2004.[28] The importance of economic development as an approach to lesson violence has also been recognized by the United States in Iraq, where steps are now being taken to create jobs for Iraqis as a means to quell the violence brought about by the insurgents.[29] The creation of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the Millennium Challenge Account to support U.S. public diplomacy are indeed efforts in the right direction.

<u>Achieving Unity of Effort</u>

The battle of ideas is concurrently a battle of will and resolve. The final and no less important element in the fight against the Islamist terrorist movement is to achieve unity at the home front in the United States. As the former U.S. Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, pointed out in his interview with the *Miami Herald* in December 2006, in the war on terror, there are "two centers of gravity. One is in Iraq and the region; the other is here (in the United States)."[30] The importance of information war in the U.S. backyard is also not lost to Al Qaeda, which explicitly stated the intent to launch "a media campaign … to create a wedge between the American people and their government," by sending the American people the message "that their government will bring them more losses, in finances and casualties." And that "they are being sacrificed … to serve … the big investors, especially the Jews." These messages are meant "at creating pressure from the American people on the American government to stop their campaign against Afghanistan."[31]

In a democracy, leaders have to constantly pay attention to public opinion. Given the perishable nature of public support, democratic governments tend to avoid long drawn conflict, and are averse to sustaining casualties in war. In conventional warfare between states, democratic governments have the option of waging or avoiding war. They prefer only to get into those wars that they are confident of winning. Even if war is forced upon the countries, there is always the possibility of diplomatic negotiations to bring the conflict to a closure. However, the logic of the global war on terror is totally different from conventional warfare. The United States has no option of backing away from the war or to end the war quickly. There is simply no state government to negotiate with, and given the zero-sum nature of Al Qaeda's agenda, there is no room for compromise. As the Bush administration has always emphasized, this is a different kind of war, and this is a long war. The key challenge is to sustain U.S. public will and support over the long haul.

As the war in Iraq drags on and as U.S. casualty increases, American unity and will to fight are starting to show signs of erosion. The perception that Americans are unwilling to sustain casualties in war is often seen as a weakness by both friends and foes alike. Al Qaeda has cited examples of U.S. failures to defeat the Vietnamese infantry in Indochina, the militia in Lebanon, and the warlords in Somalia to illustrate U.S. weakness. However, the initial employment of U.S. military power in Afghanistan and Iraq, especially the commitment of decisive land forces, backed by strong public support at home, did send a strong signal to all about U.S. resolve. The subsequent support given by Pakistan, Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, and the acquiescence of Libya, renouncing its nuclear program, demonstrated the effect that such unity and resolve could achieve. However, the ongoing partisan disagreements over the war on terror, especially pertaining to the worsening situation in Iraq, is creating disharmony in the U.S. war effort. The continue divide in views amongst the political leaders and public will affect the morale of the troops fighting on the ground and cause confusion among allies, thus resulting in seams and vulnerabilities where Al Qaeda can exploit.

The main reason for the disharmony is a lack of consensus on the nature of the conflict and how the U.S. interests are at stake. As Andrew Mack noted in his article *Why Big Nation Lose Small War,* the reason for the disharmony in a democracy lies in how the war is perceived in terms of the stakes at hand which translated into differing political wills to fight. The side that is more determined to win is the side that has the highest stakes involved. [32] The situation has become a clash of views between those who see this as a war that must be won versus those who see the war as marginal. As Donald Rumsfeld noted, in this long war "any kind of moral and intellectual confusion about who and what is right or wrong can severely weaken the ability of free society to persevere."[33]

There is an urgent need to set aside the differences and come to a national consensus on how the war on terror should be prosecuted. Reaching a national consensus is by no means an easy feat, given the nature of U.S. democracy, where freedom of speech is a deeply held value, and public policy is very much influenced by domestic electoral politics. However, in the war against terror, where it is a contest of will as much as it is a contest of arms, nothing short of a NSC 68 equivalent in-depth assessment must be produced to galvanize the nation.[34] The process of reconciliation and consensus-building is difficult but absolutely essential if United States and the world at large are to prevail over the Islamist terrorist movement.

Conclusion

The war against Islamist terrorism will be a long drawn affair because the enemy has the staying power. The response of the Islamic world to the challenges of modernization will be the single most profound development in this century. In the process, Al Qaeda may be transient but the complete eradication of the ideology of Islamist terrorism may well be unlikely. How Islamic societies cope with the changes is for Muslims to decide, where non-Muslims have no standing to participate. However, the menace of Islamist terrorism affects every society, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. The growing Muslim populations in many western societies also means that people from different religions will have to learn to live with one another. Moreover, the prospect of terrorists acquiring and using weapons of mass destruction is a clear and present danger to humanity.

The transnational threat of Islamist terrorism will have to be confronted by all nations. As the sole superpower, the United States has a leadership role in the fight against Islamist terrorism. In this global fight, the United States cannot and should not do it alone, and the world must be united. While the theological debate is to be won by moderate Muslims, the words and actions of U.S. policies are important enablers that will support that effort. Building and leading a global coalition will lighten the burden put on the shoulders of the United States and lessen the domestic divide. Listening to and being patient with the international community will go a long way of lending moral authority and legitimacy to U.S. leadership. As the saying goes, "slow is smooth, smooth is fast," in the long war, the race is a marathon not a sprint, it pays to be patient and persistent.

Endnotes

[1] George W. Bush, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism,* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2006), p.1.

[2] Susan B. Epstein, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: Background and the 9/11 Commission Recommendations* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Services Report RL32607, 1 May 2006), pp. 5-6.

[3] Declassified Key Judgments of the National Intelligence Estimate, "Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States," April 2006; available from http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/library/reports/2006/nie-global-terror-trends_apr2006.htm; internet; accessed on 23 September 2006.

[4] Rowan Scarborouh, "Papers Reveal Weakening Terror Group," *The Washington Times*, 16 June 2006, p. 1.

[5] Declassified Key Judgments of the National Intelligence Estimate.

[6] Pew Research Center, "The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other," Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 2006; available from http://www.pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=253; internet; accessed on 1 October 2006.

[7] Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The Dilemmas of National Insecurity," in *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership,* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), pp. 24-28.

[8] Joseph E. B. Lumbard, "The Decline of Knowledge and the Rise of Ideology," in *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition,* ed. Joseph E. B. Lumbard (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2004), p. 41.

[9] John L. Esposito, *The Islamist Threat: Myth or Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 49-50.

[10] Coalition Provisional Authority, "Text from Abu Musab al Zarqawi Letter," February 2004; available from http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iraq/2004/02/040212-al-zarqawi.htm; internet; accessed on 15 October 2006.

[11] Blake Ward, *Osama's Wake: The Second Generation of Al Qaeda* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University, Counterproliferation Papers, Future Warfare Series, No. 32, August 2005), p. 10.

[12] Christopher M. Blanchard, *Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology* (Washington, D.C., Congressional Research Services Report RL 32759, 26 January 2006), p. 16.

[13] Scarborouh, p. 1.

[14] After the bombings in London, Muslim leaders in the United Kingdom and Australia stood up to condemn the action of the terrorists. Grand Imam Sheikh Tantawi of Al-Azhar said: "Those responsible for (the) London attacks are criminals who do not represent Islam or even truly understand (its message)."

[15] Karen Hughes, "Where is the Outrage?" *USA Today,* Op-Ed., 12 September 2006, available from http://www.stat.gov/r/; internet; accessed on 8 January 2007.

[16] The publication of the cartoons was in response to the on-going debate regarding criticism of Islam and self-censorship. As the controversy grew and as examples of the cartoons were reprinted in newspaper in more than fifty other countries, violent and peaceful protests, including rioting, erupted particularly in the Muslim world.

[17] Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, *What's right with Islam: A New Vision for Muslims and the West* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 276.

[18] Karen Hughes, "Strategic Objectives," available from http://www.stat.gov/r/; internet; accessed on 8 January 2007.

[19] George W. Bush.

[20] Amany A. Jamal, "Reassessing Support for Islam and Democracy in the Arab World? Evidence from Egypt and Jordan," *World Affairs* 169 (Fall 2002): pp. 59-60.

[21] Aaron D. Pina, *Palestinian Elections* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Services Report RL33269, 9 February 2006), p. 1.

[22] Esposito, p. 215.

[23] Barry Desker and Kumar Ramakrishna, "Forging an Indirect Strategy in Southeast Asia," in *The Battle for Hearts and Minds: Using Soft Power to Undermine Terrorist Networks*, ed. Alexander T.J. Lennon (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 2003), p. 58.

[24] Anthony J. Blinken, "Winning the War of Ideas," in *The Battle for Hearts and Minds: Using Soft Power to Undermine Terrorist Networks*, ed. Alexander T.J. Lennon. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 2003), p. 282.

[25] Remarks of Andrew Kohut to The Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, "American Public Diplomacy in the Islamic World," 27 February 2003; available from http://www.foreign.senate.gov/testimony/2003/KohutTestimony/030227.pdf; internet; accessed on 5 October 2006.

[26] Paul Dibb, "The Future of International Coalitions: How Useful? How Manageable?" in *The Battle for Hearts and Minds: Using Soft Power to Undermine Terrorist Networks*, ed. Alexander T.J. Lennon (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 2003), p. 29.

[27] Ibid., p. 35.

[28] A nationwide poll conducted by a leading Indonesian pollster, Lembega Survei Indonesia, in the aftermath of the Tsunami disaster showed more people favored U.S. led efforts to fight terrorism than opposed them (40% to 36%), as a direct result of U.S. humanitarian assistance.

[29] Josh White and Griff Witte, "To Stem Violence, U.S. Aims to Create Job," 12 December 2006; available from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-wyn/content/article/2006/12/11/AR2006121101318_pf.html; internet; accessed on 28 January 2006.

[30] Donald Rumsfeld, "Donald Rumsfeld: The Exit Interview," 12 December 2006; available from http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=18423; internet; accessed on 28 January 2006.

[31] Coalition Provisional Authority.

[32] Andrew Mack, "Why Bing Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics*, 27 January 1975, pp. 181-182.

[33] Donald Rumsfeld, "Address at the 88th Annual American Legion National Convention," 29 August 2006; available from http://www.defenselink.mil/Speeches/ Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1033; internet; accessed on 13 October 2006.

[34] NSC 68 was a top secret document produced by the U.S. Department of State in 1950 to the National Security Council. Entitled "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," the paper comprehensively analyzed the ongoing cold war and courses of action open to the U.S. The recommendations of NSC 68 eventually form the basis of a successful strategic plan for the cold war.