CAN THE UNITED STATES "DEFEAT" AL QAEDA?

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CAN THE UNITED STATES "DEFEAT" AL QAEDA?

The United States military wins its wars by defeating its enemies. Winning is a matter of national pride as well as historical precedence. With the exception of the Vietnam War, the U.S. has never been on the losing end of a conflict.[1] In the late 1990's, Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden declared war on the U.S.[2] This was followed by a series of terrorist attacks in Africa and Yemen, culminating with an attack on the homeland on September 11, 2001. The targets struck by AQ, in New York, N.Y., and Washington, D.C., were selected based on their strategic value to the fundamentalist Islamic cause as written in the fatwas issued by bin Laden.[3]   As a result of the September 11 attack, President George W. Bush declared war on Al Qaeda with the goal of eliminating Al Qaeda (AQ) as a threat to national security. Since then, AQ has been under substantial counterterrorism pressure, mainly in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and the Horn of Africa (HOA). Yet, in spite of such pressure from the U.S. and its allies, AQ has continued to proliferate into a global network with global reach.

Since starting nine years ago, the war has undergone name changes but has remained essentially the same in terms of strategy. Under President Bush, the name started as the "Global War on Terrorism" (GWOT) and was later shortened to the "War on Terrorism" (WOT). Under President Obama the name changed again to Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO). The name change was thought to signal a strategy shift but that did not materialize.

The length of the conflict and the cost in lives, as well as dollars, runs counter to a traditional American concept of war. The traditional American way of winning a war means the other side loses. Losing the war means the losing side's underlying strategic

objectives are not accomplished, their military forces are defeated in battle and their will to continue is destroyed. The "win/lose" concept drives strategic planning and is embedded within military culture and doctrine. For example, JP 3.0 states, "The chief principle for employment of US forces is to achieve national strategic objectives established by the President through decisive action and conclude operations on terms favorable to the United States."[4] The purpose of this paper is to determine whether or not a traditional defeat of AQ is possible given the nature of the current fight.

<u>"Defeat" Defined</u>

*"Defeat – **1**: Destroy; **2**: a. Nullify; b. Frustrate; **3**: to Win victory over: to beat <defeat the opposing team>."[5]* The United States traditionally defeats its enemies by rendering them incapable of continued military action. Decisive engagement and the application of combat power to enemy centers of gravity is the doctrinal solution to the problem. By applying such doctrines of warfighting, enemy forces are attritted or destroyed with measured violence in keeping with traditional warfighting concepts. As a result, the enemy's will to continue fighting is broken and a cessation of hostilities occurs. This is followed by a negotiated peace with accords preventing the reemergence of the belligerents. However, this "traditional" method focuses on defeating an enemy force fielded by a competing nation-state. Defeating a non-state actor, such as AQ, presents a new challenge to the United States.

The decision to go to war is based on an identified threat to America's vital interests. The enemy cannot be declared "defeated" until rendered incapable of threatening U.S. vital interests. As long as the threat remains the war must continue. Termination of conflict is based on the accomplishment of the President's strategic objectives; the

military's contribution to the overall desired end state; and the meeting of "termination criteria–the specified standards approved by the President or SecDef that must be met before a joint operation can be concluded."[6] This helps the military planners derive a military endstate, "which normally represents a point in time or circumstances beyond which the President does not require the military instrument of national power as one of the main means to achieve remaining national objectives."[7] Common sense requires the strategic end state to include mitigation of the threat to U.S. vital interests regardless of the criteria under which the conflict is terminated.

The OCO End State

In the U.S., the President is empowered by the constitution and legislation to establish the National Security Strategy (NSS). The NSS seeks to eliminate current threats, as well as deter future threats, which may harm U.S. vital interests. Once the President provides the strategy, subordinate leaders develop and issue guidance to their agencies. In his speech of March 27, 2009, President Obama stated, "So I want the American people to understand that we have a clear and focused goal: to disrupt, dismantle and *defeat* al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future (italics added)."[8] In his speech at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point on December 1st, 2009, the President reiterated that strategy and expanded it beyond AQ or Afghanistan and Pakistan. He stated, "I set a goal that was narrowly defined as *disrupting, dismantling, and defeating* al Qaeda and its *extremist allies* (italics added)…."[9] President Obama also said, "The struggle against violent extremism will not be finished quickly, and it extends well beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan. It will be an enduring test of our free society, and our leadership in the

world. And unlike the great power conflicts and clear lines of division that defined the 20th century, our effort will involve disorderly regions, failed states, diffuse enemies."[10] The President clearly recognizes the war will not be of short duration and AQ may not be the only terrorist organization threatening U.S. vital interests. As a threat to vital interests, AQ and other terrorist groups linked to their cause will be subjected to the application of U.S. military power in order to defeat them and to keep them from accomplishing their objectives. For the U.S. military to actually defeat AQ in the traditional sense requires the destruction of their current forces, the elimination of their ability to reconstitute future forces, and the transformation of their "will to fight."

The American Way of War vs. Irregular Warfare

Historically, to defeat an enemy is to destroy their capability and will for continued engagement against American or Allied forces.[11] In the traditional context, upon defeating the enemy military force, the U.S. military returns to a garrison status and a post-combat euphoria settles over the nation. "The assertion here is that victory will be essentially total and probably final; it will resolve the underlying political issues."[12] The United States was engaged in WW I for one year, WW II for four years, and Korea for three. These "traditional" wars were short in duration and terminated in accordance with a U.S. concept of victory, where the military defeated the enemy force to resolve the underlying political issue. The concept of victory included negotiated cease fire agreements as a means of bringing an end to combat operations. In the latter part of the 20th century, Operations Urgent Fury, Just Cause and Desert Storm, were only weeks long in duration and were also terminated in the context of a traditional defeat of the enemy. The exception was the Vietnam War. It was a ten-year conflict, wherein the U.S. military supported South Vietnamese forces against an insurgent enemy (Viet

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Cong) supported by external regular forces (North Vietnamese Army and PRC Army). The war was considered a loss for the U.S. as its strategic goals were not accomplished and U.S. forces were withdrawn.

The loss in Vietnam reshaped American military thinking about "irregular warfare"[13] and the political/public support necessary to effectively prosecute a war. Following the Vietnam War, America's military leaders, who had experienced the Vietnam War firsthand, embarked on a transformation of the concept of war by doing their best to forget "unconventional war" and focus on conventional conflicts.[14] Fifteen years after the fall of Saigon, the so-called Powell Doctrine[15] resulted in the massive application of combat power and the "will to win" against Saddam Hussein's Iraqi Army during Operation Desert Storm. This was a direct result of the lessons learned from the Vietnam War, an irregular war inappropriately fought with regular or traditional forces. The lack of the doctrinal tenets, now replaced by the Powell Doctrine, had been seen as central to the loss in Vietnam, i.e., "Fighting should be guided by a theory of victory, otherwise the result tends to be a 'strategy of tactics.'"[16] Operation Desert Storm validated America's preferred method of conducting war and defeating its enemies.

However, the doctrine which makes up the preferred method of war is based on wars fought by conventional militaries fielded by nation-state actors. The opening war of the 21st century, initiated by AQ's attack on the United States, is an irregular war conducted by a non-state actor. As an irregular war, it does not fit the template for the preferred American way of war. "There is a traditional American way of war, and its features do not privilege the strengths required to succeed against irregulars."[17] In the current fight "[the U.S.] cannot apply a simple template or rely on power-point wisdom

which promises victory in 'five easy steps.'"[18] The traditional way of war can be characterized by the use of massed forces and fires, along with maneuver and an aggressive posture. However, "…America's traditional way of war, privileging firepower, mobility, and an aggressive hunt for the main body of the foe is ineffective against elusive irregular foes…."[19]

Irregular War (IW) is defined as *"a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations. IW favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities, in order to erode an adversary's power, influence and will* (italics added).*"*[20] IW draws together previous doctrinal terminology such as Unconventional Warfare (UW), Low Intensity Conflict (LIC), Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) and gives them a centralized concept and doctrine. As a result, IW has become the latest doctrinal term and includes the subsets of insurgency, counterinsurgency (COIN), terrorism and counterterrorism (CT).[21]

Terrorism, as a subset of IW and similar to insurgency, is conducted by irregular forces engaged in asymmetrical or irregular warfare against targeted nation-states. The key difference between terrorism and insurgency is that the tactics of terror are applied to innocent non-combatants as a means of coercing the nation state into a change in behavior.[22] *"Irregular warfare is warfare between regulars and irregulars. As a general rule, please note the qualification, such warfare is between a state with its legally constituted official armed forces, and a non-state adversary* (italics added)."[23] The attacks by AQ are clearly planned and conducted by an enemy with an understanding of the conduct of irregular warfare. AQ forces contain many veterans of the Afghan-Soviet

war; where the "irregular" *Mujahideen* defeated the "regular" Soviet Army and where the "muj" received substantial assistance and support from U.S. sources.[24]

The nature of IW leads to significant difficulty for U.S. strategies. IW is better suited to how the enemy fights. The length of IW campaigns creates domestic political stress, as well as international political turmoil. Insurgency and terrorism are relatively inexpensive to conduct or support, and adversaries do not need to beat us on the battlefield to win, they just need to outlast us.[25] The Afghan-Soviet war was a long one, lasting 10 years and resulting in a win by the irregulars. The Vietnam War and Afghan-Soviet War are both indicative of the difficulties involved in fighting irregular wars with regular forces. Such wars are often of lengthy duration and the irregulars may often win.[26] The nature of irregular warfare as conducted by Al Qaeda favors them and not the U.S. military. The accomplishment of strategic objectives determines who is defeating whom at any given time.

Al Qaeda's Strategic Objectives

The accomplishment of strategic objectives is critical to the success of either side in a war. AQ's purpose may be identified by its strategic objectives. Al Qaeda's strategic objectives are clear; one need only read the fatwas and steady stream of rhetoric found on Al Qaeda websites. First, AQ wants U.S forces out of the Islamic Holy Land, specifically Saudi Arabia. Second, AQ wants U.S. forces out of the Middle East. Third, AQ wants U.S and Zionist interference in Islamic business ended. Fourth, AQ wants to create an Islamic Caliphate ruled by Shari'a Law, including the eradication of apostate regimes. Finally, AQ seeks the destruction of the U.S. through attacks on economic centers.[27]

Whether or not AQ is accomplishing its strategic objectives indicates whether or not they are in the process of being defeated. Boyden, Menard and Ramirez attempted to "score" the "Long War" based on Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) metrics. Using the five AQ objectives, they attempted to measure whether or not those objectives were being accomplished. They postulated that if AQ is accomplishing its goals, then the U.S. counterterrorist effort is not accomplishing theirs. According to the authors, Al Qaeda is accomplishing four of its five goals; the U.S. is defeating them in only one, the creation of an Islamic Caliphate under Shari'a Law.[28] Given this scoring, it would be difficult to affirmatively state that the U.S. is "defeating" AQ. It would also be difficult to repudiate claims that AQ is actually winning. Al Qaeda, through flexibility and adaptation while under great stresses, continues to achieve its objectives and demonstrates the principles of a "learning organization."[29] As such, AQ becomes very difficult to defeat.

AQ's plans are clearly indicative of their commitment to the accomplishment of their strategic goals. "Al Qaeda envisages what Osama bin Laden calls a 'defensive jihad' … for three different types of war–military, economic and cultural-moral–divided into four stages and with well-defined strategic, operational, and tactical-level objectives."[30] AQ's plans and strategic objectives translate into a "will to fight" that is becoming legendary, a dedication to winning no matter the cost.

Al Qaeda's Will to Fight

The violent extremist is capable of acts of violence which the American psyche has difficulty grasping. From committing mass murder by flying airliners into skyscrapers, to hacking a living person's head off in a video as a form of propaganda, the extremity of the violence defies Western reasoning. Such violence is evidence of the force of the

collective will of AQ. Such an extreme level of will translates into a commitment to the accomplishment of the mission no matter how high the personal or collective cost. This will to fight, no matter how extreme or how long or in what environment, makes AQ very difficult to defeat. It is virtually impossible to identify points for compromise or appeasement short of complete success for AQ. The negotiation of a peaceful resolution to the OCO, absent the accomplishment of AQ's strategic objectives, is impossible.[31] Even with substantial degradation of their forces and support mechanisms as a result of battle losses, AQ has not given up their efforts toward accomplishing their objectives and there has been no apparent diminishment of their will to fight. If one concedes that AQ may believe that they are winning the fight, what would be their motive behind negotiation of a settlement anyway?

AQ's will to fight can also be attributed to the nature of the root causes of their extremism. Jessica Stern identifies five broad-based grievances giving rise to religious terrorism, aka, jihad or "holy war." These are alienation, humiliation, demographics, history, and territory.[32] The two most applicable to the current conflict are alienation and humiliation. Leaders rally their followers using the "alienation" grievance by developing a concept of risk to their group's existence or way of life. In addition, they foster a dynamic of a persecuted identity, thus dehumanizing the members of an "other" group, and encouraging the creation of the capability for murdering large numbers of people.[33] An example of alienation would be the Palestinians, as an "in" group, believing that an "other" group, the Israeli's, wishes to destroy their national identity. The result is the formation of Palestinian terrorist groups which target the general Israeli population in order to influence the policies of the Israeli government.

Leaders use the "humiliation" grievance to identify and establish a real or perceived national degradation of their "in" group. They then harness the outrage of group members and encourage acts of extreme violence as a means of retribution.[34] An example of the "humiliation" grievance is the fatwa issued by bin Laden, wherein the "oppressive" and "evil" U.S. is charged with being the cause of the degradation of the Middle Eastern nations. The fatwa harnesses the outrage of Islamic extremists and directs terrorist attacks against U.S. interests and allies as a means of coercing the U.S. government into withdrawing from the Middle East.[35]

The extent of AQ's extreme application of violence also demonstrates the depth of their will to fight. Although Islamic terrorism had been present throughout the 20th century, the last decade of the 20th Century has seen a significant change in the actions of Islamic terrorists. According to contemporary terrorism expert Russell Howard, a "new", more extreme form of terrorism is unfolding. In the preface to his book, *"Defeating Terrorism: Shaping the New Security Environment,"* Howard identifies six ways of distinguishing the "new" terrorism AQ demonstrates in its commitment to the fight. First, there has been an increasing level of violence, wherein terrorist organizations desire not just to make a political statement but to also cause mass casualties. Second, the transnational and global nature of the terrorists demonstrates their commitment to destroying not only Western ideologies but also existing Islamic secular states. Third, the new terrorists are much better financed than the old terrorists. Fourth, the new terrorists are much better trained and have more actual combat experience. Fifth, the new terrorist groups are more difficult to penetrate from an intelligence point of view. Sixth, and the most insidious in Howard's view, the

availability of WMD coupled with the exponential growth of suicide missions as a means of attack.[36]

In terms of its will to fight, AQ's commitment to achieving its objectives seems insurmountable given its resiliency and durability. Resiliency is demonstrated by AQ's ability to recover from significant losses in personnel, equipment, safe havens and support. Subjected to extensive counterterrorism efforts, Al Qaeda has suffered significant battle losses. Yet, AQ has been able to regroup, rest and refit for continued operations against U.S. and Western interests. According to the late GEN Wayne Downing, "…perhaps as many as 3,000 al Qaeda members [are] in jails in 30-plus countries…."[37], and, "…close to 4,000 terrorists [have been] arrested [and] 50 percent of the al Qaeda leadership [is] off the street."[38] Additionally, approximately 4,000 to 5,000 terrorists have been killed in operations across the globe. In spite of these metrics, 2003 through 2009 saw several effective terrorist attacks, and no significant decrease in global AQ activity, causing some experts to believe AQ is more dangerous now than in 2001.[39]

Al Qaeda demonstrates exceptional durability by its ability to exist under pressure for extended periods without deteriorating. "Al Qaeda was created for long-term durability, [with] the institutionalizing of the organizational mechanisms developed in the war against the Soviet Union, and the further development of the organization to support the expansion of the Islamic revolution around the world."[40] Thousands of potential terrorists were trained in the Afghanistan camps, and more are still being trained in camps in other locations including Pakistan, the Horn of Africa and Southeast Asia. There are many trained and experienced individuals who are prepared to step up and

take charge at all levels within the organization. Cells and groups live in austere and difficult conditions without losing their drive and commitment. The continuing proliferation of cells and groups throughout the world is indicative of their will.

Clearly, Osama bin Laden designed his organization to be so diverse as to be virtually indestructible. His efforts have led to an extensively franchised network of terror organizations which has reduced the logistical tail required to survive. "Al Qaeda does not have to depend on any one or two or three sources of logistical, financial, manpower, sanctuary, or political support. Rather, AQ support is diversified to the point at which an enemy is unable to shut it down."[41] Recently, Daniel Benjamin, Coordinator of the Office for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, stated, "…we know now al-Qa'ida affiliates–not just the group's core leadership in Pakistan–will indeed seek to carry out strikes against the U.S. homeland. We can no longer count on them to be focused exclusively on the near enemy – on the governments in their own countries.[42] AQ's virtual indestructibility, combined with resiliency and durability, makes them nearly impossible to defeat in the classical context. In addition, the franchised nature of its affiliation with other terrorist groups increases the difficulty of defeating it.

Al Qaeda and Its Affiliates

AQ is not a single military-style force restricted to a specific geographic locale, it more clearly resembles a franchise based on affiliations with other violent extremist organizations.[43] This widely distributed organizational structure makes them difficult to locate for military targeting or for the conduct of effective counterterrorism strikes against them. Dispersed throughout the world, AQ possesses or hosts affiliates in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia,

Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Algeria, Chechnya, northwestern China, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, as well as parts of Europe and South America.[44] Such geographic dispersion has probably contributed to AQ's survival and their ability to thrive without state sponsorship. AQ's ability to survive contrasts with earlier Islamic terror groups active in the mid-20th century who required state sponsors for protection from counterterrorist operations. Today, Al Qaeda successfully negates this requirement and defies the expert thinking that state sponsorship is necessary for a terrorist group to survive. Many experts now believe Al Qaeda's continued proliferation can be attributed to its dispersed organizational structure.[45] AQ's global dispersion combined with their continued proliferation in the face of substantial counterterrorism efforts creates significant impediments to defeating them. By conventional warfare measures, AQ should have been significantly degraded and on the road to capitulation by now, but it is not. Given the evidence presented, AQ appears to defy a "win/lose" solution for the U.S. and its partners.

The Irish Experience

An example of whether or not IW in the form of terrorism can be defeated is the British campaign against the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Northern Ireland. The British military is often touted as "expert" in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency, and many hold British success to be unarguable. This is especially so in the case of the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland from 1930 through 2001. In looking for counterterrorism models, pundits often refer to the way the British "defeated" the Irish Republican Army. Between 1969 and 1998, the "low-intensity conflict" resulted in over 3600 deaths and scores more injuries due to the violence.[46] In 1998, a cease-fire was negotiated after significant civil-political measures were enacted to ameliorate the underlying conditions

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of the insurgency. The resulting treaty went into effect in 1999 and was hailed as the peaceful end to Irish terrorism. Amnesty for suspected terrorists was granted and the terrorists surrendered their weapons in 2001. The British government declared Irish terrorism "defeated."[47]

Ten years later Irish terrorism is resurging. A BBC television expose´ on 22 October, 2009, reported an average of one terrorist incident per day over the last two years in Northern Ireland. IRA units have reconstituted, causing the senior police official for Northern Ireland to state the "threat is greater now than at any time in the last ten years."[48] There have been eleven attempts to kill police officers and several bombs have been found by security patrols at the homes of police officers and their family members. A girlfriend of a police officer was seriously injured when a bomb under her car detonated, and thirty-eight other officers and their families have had to go into hiding due to credible threats. Fifty more police officers and their families have incurred additional security measures for their protection. The rail line between Dublin and Belfast closed 750 times due to security concerns over the last two years. Two British soldiers were killed in 2009 and the IRA claimed responsibility for their murders. An interviewed IRA spokesman identified all British citizens, whether in Ireland or on the "mainland", as legitimate targets for future acts of terrorism.[49]

Terrorist violence is continuing, as demonstrated by a 22 November, 2009, attack consisting of a 400 lb. vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) being driven into a police station parking lot in Belfast. The detonator for the device failed to set off the explosives, resulting in a car fire instead. Within a few days following the event, two police officers were shot by members of an IRA sub-group, the "Continuity IRA." These

events caused the Northern Ireland Security Minister to remark, "Very clearly these people are trying to undermine the progress which has been made in Northern Ireland."[50]

England has poured millions of pounds sterling into Northern Ireland and has addressed numerous Irish Republican complaints. The British government has ceded local political control to a shared forum of Catholic and Protestant representation. British government funds have created welfare programs, education programs, trade and craft programs, and medical programs. These programs were the direct result of negotiations with the political leadership of the IRA and were designed to ameliorate the conditions giving rise to Irish extremism.[51] Yet, it has clearly been insufficient to satisfy hard-core Republican terrorists. The cease fire is dead and Irish terrorism, once declared "defeated," is back.

U.S. leaders should take heed of Great Britain's "Irish experience." Extrapolation of England's failure to defeat Irish terrorism should inform strategic leaders' thoughts on defeating AQ. Decisively defeating AQ is highly unlikely and the conflict, like the "Troubles", will be extended over a long period of time.

A Persistent Conflict

On September 27, 2007, GEN George Casey, Chief of Staff of the Army, stated, "In my time in Iraq, I spent a lot of time reading about Al Qaeda's ideology and their direction and they are out to destroy our way of life and they will continue to work at it until we prevail or they succeed—and they won't succeed. But as I look to the future what I see is a future of what I call *persistent conflict. I define that as a period of protracted confrontation among states, non-states and individual actors, who are increasingly willing to use violence to achieve their political and ideological ends* (italics

added). That's what I see coming for the next decade or so."[52] On October 9, 2007, GEN Casey, said he "…foresees decades of *persistent conflict.*…" and "terrorists will continue to attack America."[53]

Persistent conflict is a euphemism recognizing that there is no visible end to the war and no currently achievable means of decisively concluding it. The war commenced under the previous administration and continues during this present one, with no marked difference in strategic end state. As Ian Shapiro observed, "The 'war on terror' is open-ended, as we have seen. No politician will likely assume the risk of declaring it won, even though President Bush … has committed–and recommitted–the nation to that goal."[54] The obvious struggle for the upper levels of national strategic leadership is in defining the outcome for the war (end state), communicating the strategic objectives leading to that outcome, and determining the ways and means for achieving it. Identifying the war as a "persistent conflict" does not enhance strategy and does not fit within the parameters of the national calculus for war and its end.

The term "persistent conflict" implies the nature of the war precludes a win/lose scenario. The reality of the situation, though, is that it is not the "conflict" that is "persistent", it is the enemy. AQ's resilience, durability, flexibility, adaptability, will to fight, affiliated franchises, and dispersed organizational structure render a rapid and conclusive termination of this conflict impossible. Essentially then, whether deliberately or not, the strategy shifts to a series of opportunistic tactical engagements over extended periods of time. Each of these tactical, rather than strategic, engagements becomes an end in itself, seen as a "win" over the enemy, yet achieving little overall impact on the strategic outcome. Much like the "War on Drugs", the "War on Crime",

and the "War on Poverty" (prolonged wars not yet "won"); the "persistent conflict"

becomes more of a long-term military siege than a military victory. Terrorists are

occasionally located, isolated, restricted, and attacked, but never destroyed or defeated.

Given the great deal of blood and treasure invested in the fight over the last nine years,

conflict termination still eludes U.S. strategic leaders.

Results of the OCO So Far

While the investment in the OCO has been significant, the return on the

investment has been unimpressive. Up to this point in the war, roughly 5300 U.S.

service member lives, 420 British soldier lives, and 508 other coalition lives have been

lost as a result of overseas operations,[55] and $975 billion has been spent.[56] Al Qaeda

has been significantly disrupted, but neither dismantled nor defeated. AQ is still in

operation and still capable of planning and executing attacks, as demonstrated by the

Christmas Day, 2009, attempted downing of an airliner over Detroit. AQ has been

steadily developing its capability for exporting terror attacks from new bases and safe

havens in various parts of the world, including South Asian countries, sub-Saharan

Africa, and parts of Southeast Asia.[57] Home grown cells within "western" countries like

Great Britain, Spain and the United States continue to proliferate and conduct

operations.[58] There exists a cadre of experienced fighters schooled in irregular tactics,

techniques and procedures through combat engagements in Afghanistan, Iraq, the

former Soviet states and Southeast Asia. Al Qaeda is still organized, still functioning

and still continuing its fight. Most importantly, AQ's "will" to fight has not been broken.

The results of the OCO, so far, are indicative of an ineffective strategy, a strategy built

around the "defeat" of AQ.

Traditional Defeat Redefined

As has been clearly identified, traditional defeat of Al Qaeda cannot be accomplished. The nature of terrorism as a component of irregular warfare does not lend itself to the preferred American method of conducting or concluding wars. There is no military center-of-gravity to mass forces against, nor are there visible dispositions of forces to be attacked. AQ forces rely on small arms and explosives readily obtained through existing grey and black market operations.[59] Not all insurgencies use terrorist tactics, but all terrorists fight as insurgents, making conventional military operations ineffective for other than short-term impact on the enemy.[60]

Another component is destroying the enemy's "will to fight." The grievances leading to radicalization lie within the psyche of individuals and groups. As noted earlier, the nature of the grievance is proportional to the strength of the enemy's will. Offering solutions to mitigate the grievances is difficult because there is great diversity in what causes sufficient radicalization to lead to terrorist acts. What may be a "solution" for diminishing a grievance for one group may be a catalytic "call to action" for another. Ideology is difficult to change, especially when it becomes connected to violence. As long as there is one armed ideologue, acts of terrorism will occur. When groups of armed ideologues form, there is an exponential increase in risk to those they view responsible for their grievances and against whom the tactics of terror then become justified. Given these reasons, AQ cannot be defeated, at least in the classical context. What is needed is a redefinition of "defeat."

AQ cannot be defeated in the traditional American context, but their ability to conduct global operations can be severely limited. Defeating AQ must be redefined as

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a continuous series of operations applying all facets of national power. The objective then becomes achieving tactical and operational successes in order to prevent AQ from achieving its global objectives (fatwas). It must also be recognized that AQ's organizational structure and methods defy decisive engagement or achieving a traditional end state resulting in peace from terrorism. The existence of certain conditions and/or the accumulation of certain metrics can be evidence the U.S. is being effective in defeating terrorism. But an end to the conflict, at least for a couple of generations, cannot be considered an achievable goal. Combating terrorism will require a long-term, multi-generational approach with an uncertain outcome.

The lack of American deaths at the hands of terrorists cannot be a metric for measuring strategic success. It is nearly impossible to prevent all terrorist attacks. Based on the current level of terrorist activity, Americans will be killed by terrorists and any attempt by the U.S. government to persuade otherwise continues to perpetuate the false belief that terrorism can be defeated. American interests and citizens are so widely dispersed in the world that they will always be targets of opportunity for AQ. The more important metric to be included in measuring success is the lack of a strategically effective strike by terrorists on U.S. interests. The U.S. and the world cannot afford another 9/11, so rather than focusing on a traditional "victory" in the war on terror, the U.S. should adjust the end state. The measure of success for the U.S. strategy should be an Al Qaeda that is unable to conduct global operations. The lack of strategic success of the current strategy, combined with an era of "persistent conflict", becomes highly suggestive of a need to find an alternative strategy.

Deterrence and Containment as Alternative Strategies

Deterrence is essentially a cost/benefits ratio forced upon the terrorists. If the resulting benefit is not worth the cost of the operation, in terms of dollars, lives, support or message, then the terrorists are deterred from conducting the operation. To be effective, deterrence must send a clear message to AQ. An attack will incur an immediate and aggressive response. Through deterrence, AQ's "will" may be shifted away from the conduct of global operations against a power willing and capable of an immediate and devastating response, to localized actions against less threatening adversaries. Primary components of deterrence include containing terrorists to restrict their global reach, denial of sanctuary, and separation of their tactical forces from their strategic leadership. This would reduce their capabilities to the point that they would be a "regional threat, then a state threat, then a provincial or local threat that can be controlled as ordinary crime by local law enforcement."[61]

AQ, as a widely dispersed global organization utilizing networking concepts, is potentially vulnerable to deterrence. *"Deterrence operations convince adversaries not to take actions to threaten US vital interests by means of decisive influence over their decision-making. Decisive influence is achieved by credibly threatening to deny benefits and/or impose costs while encouraging restraint by convincing the actor that restraint will result in an acceptable outcome."* [62] The central theme that results is one of "decisively influenc[ing] the adversary's decision-making calculus in order to prevent hostile actions against US vital interests."[63] In order to build a successful deterrence strategy, the U.S. must exhibit a credible threat to AQ's ultimate survival, as recognized by the terrorist group. Regardless of the specific threat posed against AQ's survival, the U.S. must demonstrate an unwavering willingness to engage the terrorists globally and

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maintain sufficient national security force structure to do so. No matter what that threat

to AQ's survival is, two important associated factors must be a U.S. national willingness

to engage the terrorists and a recognized military capability for doing so. Absent those

two factors, deterrence will likely fail.

A containment strategy, given its historical success in the twentieth century, should

be considered as a viable alternative to the "defeat" strategy of the twenty-first.[64] It

applies the principles from the Cold War strategy of "containing" the spread of

communism by combating Soviet-sponsored insurgencies and terrorist acts on a

strategic-geographic basis. It also costs substantially less than the current strategy[65]

and appeals to both the American public and to our allies.[66] The process of

containment can disrupt, distract and create disorganization within the entities

attempting to conduct terrorist activities in specific locations.[67] Whether part of an

intentional strategy or not, keeping AQ disrupted, distracted and disorganized overseas

may very well have played a role in why the U.S. homeland hasn't been catastrophically

hit since September 11, 2001.

An effective containment strategy requires alliances with other nations whose

military and police forces become partner forces for the U.S. This reduces the need for

force and power projection. Such alliances are created through diplomatic and

economic efforts, enhancing national relationships. A policy of containment can also

send an important strategic message to the rest of the world, to potential allies as well

as potential adversaries. In areas such as the Middle East, where any U.S. military

presence is considered part of an imperialistic foreign policy, robust containment

activities by partner nations reduces the U.S. footprint. Fewer U.S. troops deployed in

the region means less criticism and greater potential cooperation. Cooperation

enhances legitimacy and often assists in the building of coalitions where needed. As

Ian Shapiro writes, "America's international legitimacy depends on persuading others

that we will not undertake or endorse imperial conquest, we are about preventing

domination – not fostering it."[68] Cooperation and coalition building enhances an

effective containment strategy.

Geographically containing a terrorist group to their local operational area makes

them the focus of local law enforcement efforts and keeps them off the international

stage.[69] In addition, effective containment objectives break the terrorist organization's

logistical lines and routes, preventing them from exporting activities in any organized or

effective fashion. All facets of national power, diplomatic, informational, military,

economic, financial, intelligence and law enforcement (DIMEFIL) play a role in

successfully limiting AQ's ability to conduct global operations and endanger American

interests.[70]

In this era of persistent conflict, where traditional force-on-force defeat strategies are

not effectively eliminating the Al Qaeda threat, the historically successful strategies of

deterrence and containment offer a promising alternative. Recognizing the reality of an

irregular war, deterrence and containment offer the opportunity to apply national power

in a more effective way.

Conclusion

Nine years of conflict without proof of significant disruption, dismantlement or defeat

of the Al Qaeda organization calls into question the validity of the U.S. defeat strategy.

The endstate, a traditional victory based on the preferred American way of conducting

war, is not possible in this instance. The nature of the enemy, the nature of Irregular

Warfare, and the tactics of terrorism preclude it. The lessons learned by the U.S. in the

Vietnam War, as well as those by the Soviet Army in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and the

British in Northern Ireland, are a harbinger of failure absent a change in strategy. It can

be argued that AQ is winning, or is at least ahead in terms of accomplishing its

objectives. AQs "will" to fight is far from broken and its affiliation with other Islamic

terrorist groups is expanding. The first decade of the 21st century has been an era of

persistent conflict and there is no indication of a change in the immediate future. The

results of the war, so far, have been ineffective in eliminating AQ as a threat to U.S.

interests. If defeating AQ is redefined to engender a vision of an AQ contained and

deterred, the endstate is achievable as demonstrated by the tactical success of U.S.

and coalition efforts thus far. The tactic of using terror has been historically ever

present, whether committed by an individual or a group, and will always be a fact of

human life. This necessitates a realistic National Security Strategy with achievable

objectives, not hollow rhetoric, to combat it. Can the United States "defeat" Al Qaeda?

No, but it can effectively defend itself against them using a strategy of deterrence and

containment.

Endnotes

[1] Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, And Leadership In Wartime*,
(New York, New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 175; "…one of the war's legacies is the pervasive
belief that the United States failed to achieve victory because civilian leaders "made the military
fight with a hand tied behind its back…."

[2] Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri, "Al Qaeda's Fatwa," February 23, 1998, Online
News Hour, www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1993.html, (accessed
December 21, 2009).

[3] Ibid.

[4] U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations*, Joint Publication 3-0 (Washington DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, September 17, 2006), I-2.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid, I-5.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Barack Hussein Obama, *Remarks By The President*, (White House, Office of the Press Secretary: March 27, 2009).

[9] Barack Hussein Obama, *Speech to the Corps of Cadets*, (White House, Office of the Press Secretary: December 1, 2009).

[10] Ibid.

[11] J. Boone Bartholomees, *Theory of Victory*, Parameters, (USAWC: Summer, 2008), 4.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept (JOC)*, Version 1.0, (Washington, DC: September 11, 2007), 5.

[14] John A Nagl, Winning the Wars We're In, (Foreign Policy Research Institute, Temple University, November, 2009), 4. "Our military capability to succeed in today's wars can only be explained in light of our experience in Vietnam. In the wake of that war, the Army chose to focus on large-scale conventional combat and "forget" counterinsurgency. Studies criticizing the Army's approach to the Vietnam War were largely ignored. The solution was to rebuild an Army focused exclusively on achieving decisive operational victories on the battlefield."

[15] News Hour Extra, *The Powel Doctrine: Background, Application, and Critical Analysis,* http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/iraq/powelldoctrine.html, (accessed January 27, 2010). "Essentially, the Doctrine expresses that military action should be used only as a last resort and only if there is a clear risk to national security by the intended target; the force, when used, should be overwhelming and disproportionate to the force used by the enemy; there must be strong support for the campaign by the general public; and there must be a clear exit strategy from the conflict in which the military is engaged. Powell based this strategy for warfare in part on the views held by his former boss in the Reagan administration, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, and also on his own experience as a major in Vietnam. That protracted campaign, in Powell's view, was representative of a war in which public support was flimsy, the military objectives were not clear, overwhelming force was not used consistently, and an exit strategy was ill defined."

[16] Colin S. Gray, *National Security Dilemmas: Challenges &* Opportunities (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2009), 170.

[17] Ibid., 171.

[18] Ibid., 175.

[19] Ibid., 176.

[20] Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept (JOC)*, 5.

[21] Ibid., 6.

[22] Bruce Hoffman, "Defining Terrorism" in *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment*, ed. Russell D. Howard, Reid L. Sawyer, and Natasha E. Bajema (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 26. "…*premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups, or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience.*"

[23] Colin S. Gray, *Another Bloody Century* (London, England: Orion Books, 2005), 215.

[24] The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, http://nhs.needham.k12.ma.us/cur/Baker_00/2002-p4/baker_p4_12-01_mj_sz/, (accessed January 24, 2010). "The United States condemned the occupation immediately. We sent hundreds of millions of dollars worth of guns and food to Afghanistan to aid the mujahidin and the refugees. The United Nations voted to condemn the action, and repeatedly exhorted the USSR to pull out. From throughout the Arab world, people gave money and aided the mujahidin. One of these benefactors of the war was Osama bin Laden. Although the primary reason for the Soviet withdrawal was their military failure, diplomatic pressure from around the world may have hastened it."

[25] Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare (IW) Joint Operating Concept (JOC),* 17.

[26] Colin S. Gray, *Irregular Warfare: One Nature, Many Characters*, Strategic Studies Quarterly (Winter, 2007), 51. "For example, COIN was always much more likely to be successful in the Philippines, Malaya, and El Salvador than in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Not all tasks are doable, even to a gifted strategist. Iraq today bears all the hallmarks of mission improbable…The strategist should be a pragmatist. Whether the prospective conflict is regular, irregular, or a messy, untidy combination of the two, it may not be winnable at bearable cost."

[27] Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri, "Al Qaeda's Fatwa," February 23, 1998.

[28] Andrew Boyden, Phillip Menard and Robert Ramirez, *"Scoring the Long War"*, Naval Postgraduate School paper, 8.

[29] Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization*, (New York, NY: Currency Doubleday, 1990). "Learning organizations are … organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.".

[30] Max G. Manwaring, *Insurgency, Terrorism and Crime: Shadows From The Past And Portents For The Future,* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 88.

[31] Jessica Stern, *Terror In The Name Of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Books, 2003), Part One, 282. "Rage turns to conviction. What seems to happen is that they enter a kind of trance, where the world is divided neatly between good and evil, victim and oppressor. Uncertainty and ambivalence, always painful to experience, are

banished. There is no room for the other side's point of view. Because they believe their cause is just, and because the population they hope to protect is purportedly so deprived, abused, and helpless, they persuade themselves that any action – even a heinous crime – is justified…His goal is to win at any cost."

[32] Ibid., 137.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri, "Al Qaeda's Fatwa," February 23, 1998.

[36] Russell D. Howard and Reid L. Sawyer, *Defeating Terrorism: Shaping the New Security Environment*, (Guilford, Connecticut: McGraw-Hill, 2004), preface.

[37] Wayne Downing, Global War on Terrorism*, in *Defeating Terrorism*, ed. Russell D. Howard and Reid L. Sawyer (Guilford, Connecticut: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 149.

[38] Ibid., 151.

[39] Bruce Reidel, "Al Qaeda Strikes Back," in *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment*, ed. Russell D. Howard, Reid L. Sawyer, and Natasha E. Bajema (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 581.

[40] Manwaring, *Insurgency, Terrorism and Crime*, 85.

[41] Ibid., 89.

[42] Daniel Benjamin, *Keynote Address at the CATO Institute,* January 13, 2010.

[43] Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks,* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 137. "…Salafi jihad provided so far tries to capture its empirical nature. It is not a specific organization, but a social movement consisting of a set of more or less formal organizations, linked in patterns of interaction ranging from the fairly centralized (the East Africa embassy bombings) to the more decentralized (the two millennial plots) and with varying degrees of cooperation (the Egyptian Islamic Jihad versus the Egyptian Islamic Group), resulting in more or less connected terrorist operations."

[44] Terrorist Locations, http://www.globalsecurity.org, (accessed January 23, 2010), and Al Qaeda Network, http://www.terrorism.about.com, (accessed January 23, 2010). "The term Al Qaeda is often used as if it refers to a single global group united under the leadership of Osama bin Laden. In fact, Al Qaeda is a loose affiliation of groups who claim affiliation to Al Qaeda or its stated objectives of global jihad."

[45] Jessica Stern, *Terror In The Name Of God*, 254.

[46] Thomas H. Henricksen, "What Really Happened in Northern Ireland's Counterinsurgency: Revision and Revelation," *JSOU Report 08-5 (2005)*, 27.

[47] Ibid, 47.

[48] BBC News, *400 lb Bomb Left at Policing Board*, (22 November, 2009).

[49] BBC Video Report, "Files Reveal Growing Terror Threat", 29 October, 2009.

[50] BBC News, *400 lb Bomb….*

[51] Thomas H. Henricksen, 44.

[52] George Casey, *Address to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council*, (September 27, 2009: Los Angeles, CA), 1.

[53] Elizabeth Lorge, Army.mil/news, Casey, George, *Address to AUSA* (October 9, 2007), (accessed January 29, 2010).

[54] Ian Shapiro, *Containment: Building A Strategy Against Global Terror,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 57.

[55] *Iraq Coalition Casualties Count Home Page*, http://www.icasualties.org, (accessed December 21, 2009.

[56] *National Priorities Project Home Page,* http://www.costofwar.com, (accessed December 21, 2009).

[57] Terrorist Locations, http://www.globalsecurity.org, (accessed January 23, 2010).

[58] Christopher Dickey, A Thousand Points of Hate*, Newsweek,* (January 2, 2010). "…divides the Qaeda threat into three categories: the core organization of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri that carried out the 9/11 attacks; the affiliates in Iraq, North Africa, Yemen, and elsewhere that want the prestige of the Qaeda connection but have less sophisticated capabilities; and "homegrown" terrorists who are inspired by Al Qaeda's ideology but don't have much access to training or support networks. … "Lone wolves" like U.S. Army Maj. Nidal Hasan at Fort Hood, Texas, who killed 13 people in November, or Muslim convert Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad, who allegedly killed a soldier at a recruiting office in Arkansas in June, claim to have been driven to violence by the actions of the U.S. military abroad."

[59] The Illicit Arms Trade, Issue Brief #3, http://theissue.com, (accessed February 12, 2010). "Illicit arms trafficking fuels civil wars, contributes to sky-rocketing crime rates and feeds the arsenals of the world's worst terrorists. Particularly troubling is the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SA/LW). SA/LW account for an estimated 60-90% of the 100,000+ conflict deaths each year (Small Arms Survey 2005) and tens of thousands of additional deaths outside of war zones. They are also the weapons of choice for many terrorists. Of the roughly 175 terrorist attacks identified in last year's State Department report on *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, approximately half were committed with small arms or light weapons."

[60] Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare (IW) Joint Operating Concept (JOC),* 10; "Insurgency and counterinsurgency are at the core of IW. The purpose of insurgency is to overthrow and replace an established government or societal structure. Terrorism and

counterterrorism are activities conducted as part of IW and are frequently sub-activities of insurgency and counterinsurgency."

[61] Wayne Downing, Global War on Terrorism, 155.

[62] Department of Defense, *Deterrence Operations: Joint Operating Concept,* version 2.0, (Washington, DC: Department of Defense), 3.

[63] Ibid., 5.

[64] Ian Shapiro, *Containment, 5;* "Refashioning containment in light of the realities of the twenty-first century offers the best bet for securing Americans from violent attack while preserving democracy at home and diffusing it abroad.."

[65] Ibid., 57.

[66] Ibid., xiii.

[67] Wayne Downing, Global War on Terrorism, 152.

[68] Ian Shapiro*,Containment,* 51.

[69] Joseph D. Celeski, *Policing and Law Enforcement in COIN: The Thick Blue Line,* JSOU Report 09-2 (JSOU Press: Hurlburt Field, FL, 2009), 37-38. "The government response is to criminalize the threat and turn it into a special, legal problem. The security force sector assets of the state often hinge on an expansion of police and law enforcement agencies with extra legal and paramilitary powers, along with a commensurate retooling of the military forces to become more police-like. All activities are based on special legal authorities above and beyond the standing legal norms of the land to give the security forces enhanced capabilities to bring the "criminals" to justice."

[70]Ibid., 26. "Unity of effort cannot be achieved, over time, with all the elements of national power if organized in the Cold War model at the national level and within the military (diMefile vs. DImEFILE—changing from an overwhelming use of the military instrument of national power to greater responses in the other arenas). Persistent conflict requires a national mobilization of resources to solve the strategic dilemmas before us: How will the U.S. prevent future growth of the nontraditional enemy? How will the U.S. counter ungoverned space? How will the U.S. insert ourselves deep within the enemy's structures in order to defeat him? How will the U.S. marshal all the capabilities required to fight generational war?"