

THE EVOLUTION OF STRATEGY IN THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR



GHANI



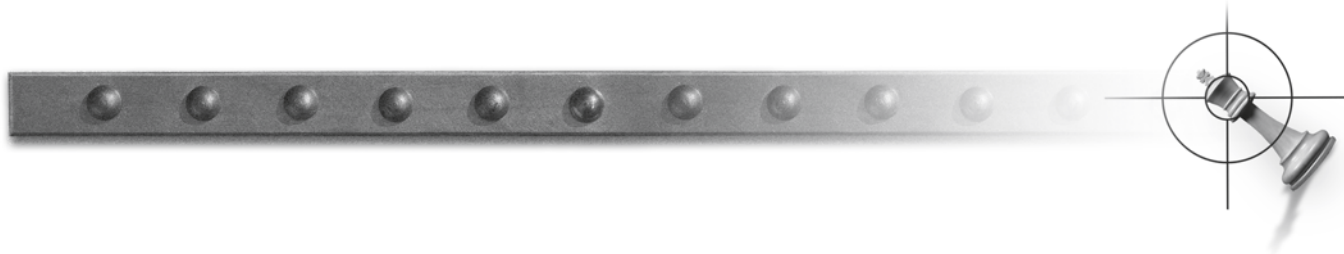
The Evolution of Strategy in the Global War on Terror

prepared by

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About the Author

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I won a game of chess yesterday. I used my favorite white strategy, the Stonewall Attack, and the black player succumbed to my bishop sacrifice as planned. By twelve moves into the game, it was all over.

Although we sometimes use chess as an analogy for describing warfare, real war strategy is much harder to grasp than chess strategy. It is quite common for a chess player to conceive his strategy before the first move (indeed, one can hardly be considered an accomplished player if his opening moves are not informed by some specific strategy) and for that strategy to prevail throughout the game. But in war—especially in a long war—the strategy one begins with will most likely evolve over time into an altogether different (sometimes even opposite) strategy than the one began with. Strategic formulation in chess is a matter of education in the game and the individual player's preferences. It is unconstrained by other factors. But strategic formulation in war is constrained and influenced by political, social, and economic factors that are constantly in flux. Often those factors conspire to produce bad strategy that fails—sometimes in a limited way, sometimes catastrophically. If a nation can survive the failures, it can then graduate to the grasp of a winning strategy.

The purpose of this essay is to illustrate from the history of our Civil War how strategy evolves and then to extrapolate and suggest ways in which strategy in the global war on terror will likely evolve. I have organized the essay into two major parts: the introduction of the subject and then an after-action report on a conference sponsored by The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory. The goal is to show which aspects of the American strategy in the war on terror will probably change and then to suggest how they will change. I will also include some specific policy recommendations, most of which emanate from conference results.





I. INTRODUCTION

In 1861, President Abraham Lincoln had to derive a strategy for winning the Civil War. He and his war cabinet chose a strategy that was almost 100% off the mark. It led to failure after failure until three years later, by which time the strategy changed into an utterly different, war-winning plan.

How did the Union finally prevail in 1864–65? What were the components of their strategy that resulted in the defeat of the Confederacy?


- Conscript, deploy, and attack simultaneously with multiple large armies against critical points in the Confederacy.
- Suspend civil liberties when and where necessary.
- Interdict the Mississippi Valley from Cairo to New Orleans.
- Seize or blockade the Gulf and Atlantic ports.
- Confiscate and/or destroy property.
- Destroy infrastructure in the Shenandoah Valley and throughout the South.
- Emancipate the slaves to close off any possibility of a Confederate alliance with Great Britain and to disable the Southern economy.

These critical components of the 1864–65 Union strategy were effective in ending the bloodiest war in American history, but they were not the strategy of choice in 1861. In fact, Lincoln and his cabinet could scarcely even discuss these options. The political, social, and economic context of the early war disallowed any consideration of such drastic measures. When Sherman predicted that the war would be long and exceedingly bloody, he was dismissed as insane. Even the nature of the war itself was at first unclear. Lincoln considered it a “secession crisis” caused by a few malcontents, while the rest of the South desired reconciliation. It

was this erroneous assessment that led to the First Battle of Manassas—and the Union’s first failure.

The first, but by no means the last. Stalemate and failure followed on the Peninsula. Then failure at Second Manassas. Then stalemate at Antietam, disaster at Fredericksburg, and defeat at Chancellorsville. By the time of the Union victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg, both Lincoln and Grant were beginning to get a much clearer understanding of the true nature of the war and what would have to be done to win it. After Antietam, Lincoln, who did not even want to touch the slavery issue at first, emancipated the slaves—a radical step to take that would *ipso facto* turn the “secession crisis” into a full-scale total war. The president’s more realistic understanding of the situation found expression in his ominous words at Gettysburg—“Now we are engaged in a great civil war....” Later, he jettisoned the cultural sensitivities that had prevented rough treatment of Confederates and their property and instead substituted a policy of deliberate destruction of the South’s economic base.

Experimentation and failure had informed and disciplined the Union’s strategic formulation until they gave birth to a war-winning strategy. In the same way, America and her allies must expect to evolve a strategy for the global war on terror—a strategy likely to be quite different from the one we began with. If the American Civil War pattern holds, the components of our eventual war-winning strategy may be too politically or culturally sensitive to consider right now. As occurred in the 1860s, we will have to soak up more failures and stalemates before we can learn the right strategy. Further attacks on the scale of 9/11 might well propel us along that path, just as bloody Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville served to educate Union strategists. Historically it has always been difficult for a nation to think critically about the evolution of strategy until it is forced to do so through failure.



But we could perhaps identify at least the major aspects of our strategy that are most likely to evolve. In Lincoln's case, the critical components that changed over time were

- Determination of the nature of the enemy and the war
- Means and methods for defeating the enemy
- Required force structure for defeating the enemy
- The slavery issue
- Identification of the right military leadership

In the war on terror, there are at least three obvious points—critical components of our strategy—that have attracted controversy and that are likely to change over time. Some of these components are similar to those confronting Lincoln:

- Determination of the nature of the enemy and of the war
- Definition of success
- Means and methods for defeating the enemy

The Nature of the Enemy

Shortly after 9/11, the Bush Administration began to characterize the enemy as a network of criminals and terrorists who enjoyed the protection of the Taliban in Afghanistan but who commanded little sympathy among the vast majority of Muslims worldwide. This handful of miscreants had an exceptional bent for nihilism and were diabolically talented troublemakers, but they were in no way representative of Islamic culture as a whole.

The implications of this theory were profound. If the enemy indeed consisted of a small group of professional criminals, then defeating them was a relatively simple matter of finding the bad guys and killing or capturing them. Preliminary to that step, the Administration decided to remove the Taliban regime in order to expose the terrorist network

there and neutralize it. Four years after the initial crisis, American strategy continues to focus on the capture of individuals as a key measure of success, but there is increasing evidence that the network is not so centralized as once believed. The list of wanted individuals grows, while the likely effects of individual captures diminishes. Although it is certainly reasonable to continue to pursue known organizers, it is becoming obvious that the problem transcends mere criminality and the influence of a few malcontents.

The decision to name the effort the “war on terror” was intended to cater to the cultural and political sensitivities of Muslims. In 2001 it was not politically acceptable to suggest that the terror problem emanated from serious and long-lived problems within the Islamic world. Such a conclusion would smack of religious bigotry and might inflame Muslims, thus worsening the insurgency problem. Instead, the Administration focused not on the enemy but rather on the enemy's weapon of choice: terror. Many commentators today think this choice regrettable and somewhat ridiculous. It is analogous to declaring a war on knives or a war on submarines.

Focusing on a tactic is not unprecedented, however. Our wars in the Mediterranean in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were aimed at the eradication of piracy—a tactic employed by various Barbary powers at the time. Still, the present “war on terror” seems to miss the point that, as one commentator put it, “not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims.” The observation, of course, is exaggerated to the level of being untrue, but the point remains: the global war on terror is aimed at Islamic terrorists, not terror in general. Further, terror played a prominent role in the creation of our own republic. New Englanders destroyed the house of Governor Thomas Hutchinson in order to terrorize him and his fellow governors. Burnings in effigy, inflammatory editorials, and the occasional tar-and-feathering were all well known factors in our drive for independence.



If we are honest with our own past, we would conclude that the problem is not *terror* or even terrorists, but rather the purposes that the terror serves. In our current war, the problem is a global system of Islamic insurgencies. Those insurgencies aim at destroying current Islamic regimes in the Middle East and elsewhere, and incidentally aim at the West, which is perceived as propping up corrupt regimes as well as supporting Israel.

As the war and its strategies continue to evolve, it is likely that America and her allies will begin to define the enemy in broader, systematic, and cultural terms. Some commentators, for example, take on the underlying theory of the current strategy by questioning the existence and relevance of so-called “moderate” Islam. Initial hopes were that with the elimination or marginalization of the violent Islamic radicals, the large, silent majority of peace-loving, democracy-wanting, non-violent Muslim moderates would emerge. Islamic Thomas Jeffersons and James Madisons would step forward and take the reins of government—and the war on terror would be over.

Some instead suggest that Islamic culture from the very beginning had within it a jihadist trend that repeatedly manifested itself through revolutionary movements, most often aimed at Islamic regimes deemed corrupt. The jihad—described as both an inner, individual, spiritual struggle *and* as an overt, communal, violent struggle—aimed at returning to “first principles” and Mohammedan purity. As to whether the West can encourage a “moderate Islam” to emerge and dominate the Muslim world, some pundits remain cautiously pessimistic.


Paul Berman, in his provocative book, *Terrorism and Liberalism*, points to the European and fascist antecedents of modern Islamic totalitarianism. He breaks with traditional interpretations by equating the Islamic revolutionary movements, like al Qaeda,

with Middle Eastern dictatorships, pointing to the fact that both appeal to Islamic ideology, and both call for totalitarianism. Both, in short, are fascist.

Others have pointed not to Islam, but to the tangential issue of the Middle East itself. The almost universal failure in both economics and politics throughout the region has left a burgeoning population of discontented, unemployed, angry young men, whose proclivity for violence has little to do with religion. If this interpretation is correct, then strategies aimed at neutralizing professional criminals or causing a Muslim reformation are worse than irrelevant. In this case, the answers have little to do with military solutions and a lot to do with nation-building and economic investment.

As the war continues to develop, it is also quite likely that our understanding of the enemy will advance from viewing them as a monolithic, unified group into a more sophisticated perception of their multi-faceted nature. This may lead to solutions along the lines suggested by Cheryl Benard, who recommends that we focus on pitting different parts of the Muslim world against each other.

Another dimension to the problem of defining the enemy is the difficult question of America’s own culpability in global terror. It is an easy matter to point to some obvious cause-and-effect relationships. At the tactical level of analysis, American military supremacy invites the tactics of irregular warfare. When the French complained about Algerian insurgents using bicycles to transport bombs in the late 1950s, one insurgent replied, “Give us war planes, and we will hand in our bicycles.” At the strategic/policy level, there can be little doubt—even among patriotic and conservative Americans—that our involvement throughout the Muslim world has trod upon cultural sensitivities. As our strategy develops, one component will likely be consideration of our own culpability.



The first step in solving a problem is defining the problem. The nature of the enemy is and will continue to be a major point of debate within the strategy of the war. Theorists from Sun Tzu to Clausewitz have reiterated the importance of understanding the true nature of the war and of the enemy. Failure to know the enemy is a conspicuous weakness in our current strategy. Related to this point is the criticality of deriving the objective of the war.

Defining Success

The global war on terror lacks a conspicuous objective. This is neither surprising nor lamentable. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 were a strategic surprise that demanded (both for political and military reasons) an immediate response. Thus, the first few steps in the war on terror had to be taken without the benefit of a clear, far-reaching strategy. But as the war continues, the initial drive for action must evolve into a defined goal or set of goals of some sort. Fighting a war without an objective is perhaps the most infamous blunder a nation can make.

The National Security Strategy of 2002 proclaimed in no uncertain terms one of the salient objectives of the current war: to bring democracy and liberty to the Islamic world. The Bush Administration's NSS is pointedly idealistic and laments the subjugation of women and the lack of representative government that characterize the trouble spots of the world. One of the objectives of the war, then, is the establishment of democratic governments abroad, complete with constitutional protections for women and religious dissenters.

The two concepts of democracy on the one hand and human rights on the other are regarded as congenital twins in the West. Indeed, they are scarcely indistinguishable from each other. But in the Muslim world they may well become mortal enemies. A democratic march into *Shari'a* or some other form of fundamentalism is likely to be inimical to women's rights and religious freedom. Conversely, it might require the strictest form of tyranny to

impose such rights on an unwilling populace. This bifurcation is not necessarily inevitable, but it is a strong possibility.

If democracy and human rights end up in conflict within the global trouble spots, then American policymakers may well find themselves having to make choices between the two, reminiscent of past compromises with monarchy and military dictatorships. In any case, the going-in position of the United States is that democracy results in human rights and freedom and peace. Democracy, then, becomes a major objective in the global war on terror. But at the same time it becomes another major controversy. It is a point in our strategy that continually bears scrutiny and flexibility.

Another goal of the United States is security. We want to be protected from future acts of terror like 9/11 or the bombing of the *USS Cole*. This objective is a difficult one to achieve, not to say impossible. First, it is a negative goal—we want something to not happen. The problem with a negative goal is that it remains achieved—until something happens. In other words, it is never permanently achieved. The Carthaginians were permanently destroyed in the Third Punic War. Hitler was permanently deposed in World War II, as was Saddam Hussein in Operation Iraqi Freedom. These were all irreversible achievements. But the prevention of terrorism is accomplished only as long as an act doesn't happen. Hence, security from future terror literally is unattainable.

Hence, we must transform the unattainable into something more concrete. What lesser objectives could we aim for and accomplish that would facilitate the desired security from terror? There are military/law enforcement, diplomatic, economic, and cultural objectives that fit this mold. The military/law enforcement objectives must include the destruction or neutralization of known terrorists, their weapons, and their bases. We can destroy only what we know of, so this military objective will require robust intelligence operations



to consistently find, identify, and track terrorists. A related objective, and one that is currently attending our overall strategy, is counter-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Diplomatic objectives that serve the goal of security would include multilateral and bilateral treaties that provide for the suppression and extradition of terrorists. Furthermore, the United States will likely continue to press for the suppression—indeed, the eradication—of official hate-mongering in the Islamic world. The madrassahs—free religious schools for the poor—are viewed by the West as terrorist recruitment centers, and it is likely that diplomatic agreements between the United States and Islamic regimes will address them.

If our definition of the problem, as described above, focuses on the economic failure throughout the Middle East, then the creation of economic success becomes a necessary end state. This goal at least has the benefit of being easily gauged. Our strategy, for example, could be to sustain a double-digit GDP growth throughout the region. The logic behind such an approach would be that growth equals jobs, and jobs mean fewer recruits for terror. The question facing us is whether this causality is accurate, and whether real growth is achievable.

The war on terror is not destined for a V-E or V-J Day. The nature of the war almost defies any definable end-point. During the run-up to the presidential election of 2004, John Kerry was widely criticized by Republicans for suggesting that we need to reduce terrorism to a mere “nuisance.” While objective debate is next to impossible in an election year, it was surprising that this idea was so summarily dismissed. Since no one can guarantee the total eradication of terrorism, Kerry was accurate in his strategic formulation on this point. It is unreasonable to think that we can make the United States of America and her allies completely free from terror. It is, however, quite reasonable to

suggest that we can prevent disasters on the scale of 9/11. By pursuing what I term a “strategy of inoculation” we can aim not at destroying terror or terrorists but rather at preventing serious disruption of our society when attacks occur.

Inoculation involves two components: hardening defenses and de-synchronizing attacks. The former includes not just increasing the strength of police forces, barriers, and intelligence but also taking steps to prevent catastrophic consequences in our economy when an attack occurs. De-synchronizing attacks is the other critical component. One of the reasons that 9/11 was such a catastrophe was that the enemy was able to commandeer *four* aircraft and attack *three* prominent buildings. While even one such incident would have been a tragedy, it was the simultaneous attacks that multiplied the emotional impact of the assault.

Is it possible to envision an end-state in the global war on terror? Is it possible to pursue a rational strategy *without* defining an end-state? This will be a critical component to our strategy and one that by definition will have to evolve.

Methods and Means

In the future, should America and her allies “widen” the war or “narrow” it? The initial strategy called for an extremely narrow war—a surgical removal of the culprits of 9/11. But the trend among many writers is that the future will see a more inclusive war against cultures that are inimical to peace and moderation. The decision to invade Iraq as a part of the war on terror has probably been the most controversial aspect of the Bush Administration’s strategy so far. Will American strategy continue to evolve into attacks on other nations as a component of the war on terror?

Cheryl Benard recommends a grand strategy of allying with Islamic modernists and, to a lesser



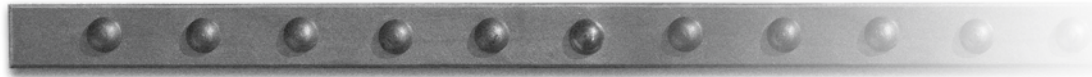
degree, secularists. She recommends keeping our distance from the traditionalists and advocates a hard line against the fundamentalists. In short, she represents a line of strategic thinking that looks to effecting change within Muslim societies as a way of marginalizing radical fundamentalists.

Ralph Peters points to the continued killing of Muslim insurgents as a good thing in and of itself. He insists that industrial age theories of war that envision a blitzkrieg-like out-maneuvering of the enemy are useless and effete. Rather, he states that whatever our grand strategy may evolve to, a major component of that strategy must be the violent eradication of bad guys.

Others have pointed to a conspicuous weakness in American foreign policy: our inability to make effective use of propaganda—a word that in our culture has a devious connotation. It is a matter of record that the Muslim world is awash in anti-American propaganda that spews from Muslim media, populist politicians, madrassahs, and mosques. As Ralph Peters explains, the Western world's deification of fact and truth has little relevance in Muslim societies of the Middle East. What is

far more important there is what people *want* to believe. Large-scale regional failures leave political and religious leaders in the region little choice but to blame others. It remains emotionally rewarding for those suffering poverty and repression to blame Israel and America for their woes. In this context, we are losing the war of ideas. As our strategy evolves, we will have to improve our ability to get a message out in a way that will be heard.

The identification of the enemy, the definition of the end-state, and the development of effective methods are three critical components of strategy that will surely evolve in the years to come. We can either await modern versions of Fredericksburg to inform our strategic formulation or we can think critically now. As in the Civil War, there will no doubt be areas of strategy that we cannot deal with due to political and cultural sensitivities. But the broader the scope of our debate, the more likely it is that we will be able to build a grand strategy that is flexible and effective. Strategic perfection is hard to come by in the real world, but, as in chess, a winning strategy does not have to be perfect; it has to be better than the opponent's.



2. CONFERENCE RESULTS

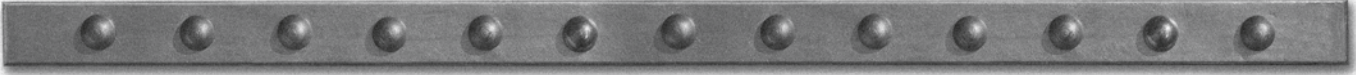
To examine these issues of how strategy is evolving and *should* evolve in the global war on terror (GWOT), The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory (JHU/APL) sponsored a two-day seminar for interested members of the national security community in April 2005. Four panelists—LTG(R) Paul Van Riper, LTC(R) Ralph Peters, Dr. Michael Vlahos, and Dr. Antulio J. Echevarria II—initiated and commented on the discussions of over fifty government and non-government members of the defense community.

Lieutenant General (retired) Van Riper directed attention to the existing set of documents that already outline and explain the United States' strategy in the war on terror, and he explained how those strategies relate to each other. The *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (NSS) is the fundamental expression of American strategy in general, and the latest one was published in 2002 by the Bush Administration. Nested under this authoritative document are three other key statements of strategy: the *National Military Strategy of the United States*, the *National Military Strategy Plan for the War on Terrorism*, and the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*. In addition, there is another set of strategy statements that are tangential to these and that fall under the rubric of the *National Strategy for Homeland Security*: the *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction*, the *National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace*, the *National Strategy of the Physical Protection of Critical Infrastructure and Key Assets*, and, finally, the *National Money Laundering Strategy*. General Van Riper noted that these strategy statements are for the most part well thought out and comprehensive, but that the challenge is to educate the country on the strategies and then implement them consistently. He also pointed to the dearth of official debate concerning strategic matters in Congress and between the military and civilian leadership of the country.

General Van Riper went on to explain that the strategic problem is complex, because the enemy's attacks use unconventional, non-traditional methods, and their networks are transnational and global, while the United States and her allies are still operating under the framework of the traditional nation-state. The essential asymmetry of the two opponents thus calls for the development of a new paradigm for fighting the war. To get to it, we have to transcend Clausewitz and his theory of *war* and instead develop a theory of *conflict*. Hence, the fundamental problem is how to bring together all agencies of the government, not just the Department of Defense.

LTC(R) Ralph Peters discussed the weaknesses of American character—primarily impatience and the need for simplistic answers. Successful counterinsurgency invariably demands persistence, but the American public continually demonstrates an unwillingness to wait or deal with complexity. Mr. Peters then discussed the nature of the terrorists opposing the United States and pointed out that they are simultaneously imbued with myth yet capable of sound and effective planning. The hard-core apocalyptic terrorist is trying to “jump-start” the end of days by bringing about a violent uprising, but he is thoroughly familiar with modern technology, and he is a master of net-centric warfare. Hence, while their goals may be irrational, the terrorists are sometimes ingenious in planning and executing their operations.

Mr. Peters stated that although it is politically incorrect to say it, there is a clash of civilizations going on. The GWOT is not really a “war of ideas” as some have maintained, because ideas derive from facts and can be articulated. Instead, we are in a conflict of beliefs. The religious extremism of the enemy is a powerful and sustained threat that will not go away easily. When it is combined with



the dynamics of mass behavior, it has an incredible capacity for bloodshed and destruction.

Mr. Peters also pointed to the pervasive and deleterious influence of corruption in the developing world and explained that unless we successfully combat it, our efforts at nation-building will remain fruitless. He summed up his initial comments by warning that we not oversimplify the problem or underestimate the enemy.

Dr. Antulio Echevarria argued that in developing and evolving a strategy, we must contemplate the end state we are seeking to achieve and then figure out how to use our assets to get there. One of our most challenging problems in this war is what Dr. Echevarria termed the “white space,” i.e., those aspects of the situation that are incalculable or unknown. Our nation-state framework excels at focusing resources against well-understood problems—political, economic, or military. But the global war on terror offers a seeming disjointed series of problems that defy definition or analysis. All this suggests that in order to derive effective strategic solutions, we must be willing and able to transcend past dogmas and analyze brand new problem sets.

Dr. Michael Vlahos focused on his extensive research into the two forms of revolutionary impulses within the Muslim world: what he terms the “Wilderness Ghazi” and the “Civil Militia.” The former comprises those self-appointed revolutionaries who draw their inspiration from literary myth—warrior-poets—and who arrive on the scene from outside civil society to restore Arabs to Islamic purity. The latter spring from society itself and band together to defend the Muslim community from any attacker. Although the Civil Militia also have a vision for the broader, global community of Muslims, their strength comes from their local roots. Dr. Vlahos warns that American strategic formulation must not suffer from confusing these two very different types of revolutionary change. While we must consistently oppose the violent and chaotic attacks of the Wilderness Ghazi, we should

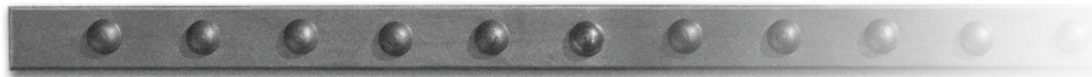
show a flexible willingness to work with Civil Militia, whose aims may not necessarily be inimical to our own.

By the same logic, Dr. Vlahos warned that Americans should refrain from the idea that we can “reform” Islam, because such cultural hubris only strengthens the hand of the Wilderness Ghazi and creates suspicion and hostility throughout the Muslim world. Instead of assuming that we can reform whole cultures, we should aim at allowing revolution to occur and encourage the Civil Militia tradition. This approach will necessitate a willingness to allow existing tyrannical governments to fail, rather than propping them up for the sake of stability.

After the four panelists presented individual opening statements, a Joint Staff (J-5) officer gave a presentation on the current status and near-term expectations of the GWOT. Based on these presentations and the overall concerns of the conference, the moderator proposed questions that the panelists and participants discussed. Since the conference was taking place in the JHU/APL Warfare Analysis Laboratory, most participants had access to networked laptop computers that permitted them to share in online discussions without interrupting the flow of the general verbal discussions. These simultaneous online discussions produced many informative ideas that were often recycled back into the main debate. Participants also had access to a networked voting tool that provided on-demand instant polling of the group’s opinions on specific questions that arose during the discussions. The following pages sum up the ideas that were presented, discussed, and voted on during the two-day conference.

Who Is the Enemy? What Is the Problem?

Shakespeare mused concerning the relevance of a name, suggesting that renaming a rose would not alter its nature. But when it comes to war, names are important, and they could even serve to change the course of events. Since President Bush’s declaration of a global war on terror (GWOT), pundits have



argued the merits of the appellation and have found problems with it. How does one wage war on a tactic, particularly a tactic that many throughout history have employed, including the United States of America?

The term GWOT also seems a caricature of political correctness. When it became clear that al Qaeda would seek to unite all Muslims against the United States and her allies, national leaders hit upon a name for the war that avoided any mention of Islam. Whatever points were scored with this discretion, however, hardly seem to compensate for a name that seems to include as enemies everyone from the Tamil Tigers to the Irish Republican Army—although neither are really the targets. The Administration's efforts to date make it crystal clear that the enemy in this GWOT is Islamic, whether we officially admit that or not. A poll of conference attendees indicated that 73% felt that the GWOT was aimed directly at Islamic terror networks.

America Names Her Wars

The history of how Americans have named their wars is a study in culture, politics, and disinformation. The First Seminole War, named for the Florida tribes who were providing aid and comfort to runaway slaves, was aimed as much at Spain as it was at the Seminoles. The Spanish-American War seemed to hit the nail on the head by clearly identifying the enemy, but the consequences of American victory were just as severe or worse for Filipino freedom fighters who had hoped that the defeat of Spain would mean the end of colonization in the Philippines. The two World Wars took on titles that described the scope of the effort, but said nothing of the enemy states or the causes of the conflicts. But the prize for the least descriptive war name has to go to the War of 1812—so named for the year it began (although events leading directly to the war actually commenced in 1811). Federalist antiwar activists were perhaps more descriptive

when they contemptuously referred to the affair as “Mr. Madison’s War,” but today we might instead have called it the Global War on Impressments—all of which still leaves the reader in the dark as to who the enemy was.

Renaming the Rose?

Conference attendees discussed the merits of the name Global War on Terror and even suggested numerous replacements. Conspicuous among the suggestions was a tendency to point to Islam as part of the problem. The national leadership is not yet ready to evolve to that step but there is certainly a large part of the population that does not shrink from identifying the enemy as being associated with a radical form of Islam. Other suggestions instead look to restraining any behavior deemed “radical.” This trend implies that the problem is not necessarily related to Islam but rather to any movement that tends toward nihilism or violently anti-establishment behavior. Still other suggested names (e.g., World War III, IV, V) emphasize the global scope of the problem. But there are points in favor of the current name, and many conferees concluded that the Administration’s choice was a wise one. Beyond the point that the title avoids demonizing Islam or its adherents, it also has the benefit of labeling the enemy with a deprecatory term. As Dr. Louise Richardson, Dean of Harvard University’s Radcliffe Institute of Advanced Study, notes in her extensive work on terrorism, the term itself invariably has a negative connotation. A war against a universally despised practice has the benefit of uniting many diverse political groups. Who, after all, could be *for* terrorism or even neutral toward it without earning a place among the terrorists in the eyes of the world?

Because the GWOT does not name a specific enemy among the radical Islamists, it leaves the United States and her partners free to choose among Islamic factions for selected alliances or

cooperation. This strategic freedom of maneuver can be a critical asset as the political situation in the Middle East continues to evolve. If Syria, for example, can be persuaded to cease sheltering radical Islamists and/or to moderate its behavior toward Israel, it could escape from inclusion in the GWOT and perhaps even lose its association with the infamous “axis of evil.” Conversely, if the Syrian regime continues to provoke the United States, the GWOT’s vague scope can be expanded to justify military action.



Is the War About Terrorism?

The term “War on Terror” still leaves much to be desired, however. As James Woolsey noted, the War in the Pacific was not against kamikazism but against Japan. The focus on the enemy’s main tactic—reprehensible though it may be—leaves too much initiative in the opponents’ hands. The strategic flexibility of the term GWOT can also work in favor of a clever enemy. If they decide to forego terror in favor of assassination, propaganda, or a coup, how does such behavior fit into American war aims? The enemy is engaged in many activities other than terrorism that are nevertheless inimical to American interests.

Why is terrorism even an issue in the conflict between radical Islamists and America? The reason emanates from purely tactical realities. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the American defense establishment has rapidly

improved its conventional war-making capability to the point that no nation or combination of nations could reasonably oppose us in that dimension. Any attempt to do so results in the rapid collapse of the offending regime, as evidenced by the demise of Manuel Noriega’s government in Panama or Saddam Hussein’s in Iraq. American tactical proficiency has eliminated all comers.

Military theory suggests, then, that the only way to oppose the superpower is to forego conventional warfare in favor of irregular techniques. These other options can include guerilla warfare, assassination, economic suasion, propaganda, passive resistance, or terrorism, among others. The Islamic fundamentalists of al Qaeda and its franchise operations have chosen this last option, and they have scored some notable successes with it. The resulting Global War on Terror is in essence a war against a logical tactical response to our own dominance in conventional warfare.

But the worst aspect of the war’s name is that it defies the development of a reasonable end state. Terror can never be eliminated; hence, a war on terror can never be concluded. In this way, the GWOT may well suffer the same fate as LBJ’s War on Poverty or Clinton’s War on Drugs: while nominal efforts continue and some worthwhile accomplishments have been scored, the election of a new administration tends to marginalize the project, and the “war” fades into the background. If Islamic insurgents are unwilling or unable to prosecute more serious attacks on the scale of 9/11 or Bali by the time of the next American presidential election in 2008, we may find a decreasing emphasis on the GWOT in favor of other emerging challenges, both domestic and foreign.

Searching for the True Nature of the Conflict

The formulation of a good strategy requires understanding the nature of the war. What is the root problem that we are trying to solve in the war on terror? What conditions gave rise to the enemy we face? Over a third of conference participants



attributed the problem mainly to the economic and political failure of the Middle East. Just over a quarter instead pointed to struggles within Islam as the main issue. A clear evolution of strategic perspective emerges from observing how American decision makers have dealt with these two issues. Shortly after 9/11, President Bush and other policymakers insisted on minimizing the role of Islam in the war on terror. The notion that the West could or should seek to enter into the debate as to the correct course for the development of Islamic thought was anathema. Instead, the Administration sought to separate al Qaeda and its sympathizers from any connection to Islam, criminalize them, and then look to a systemic fix that emphasized economics and politics in the Middle East. But in the aftermath of the attacks and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the mass popular appeal of Islamic radicalism became an unavoidable reality, forcing decision makers to consider how to compete in the realm of religious thought.

American strategy evolved. First came the recognition that religion was in fact a major issue in the war. Second, scholars and government officials began to frame the “struggle within Islam” theory that pointed to a centuries-old conflict among Islamic factions for control of the Ummah. Finally, the strategy evolved to the point that the notion of the West entering into the debate became a feasible option. The conclusion now appears to be a cautious willingness to concede that America and her allies can and must influence the development of religious thought within Islam.

Determining the Role of Religion and Reform in the War

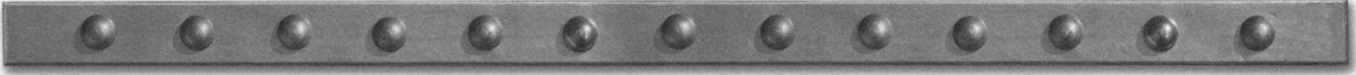
President Bush’s initial characterization of Usama bin Laden and his associates was that these nefarious criminals were not religious men. Instead, they had hijacked Islam and used it as a cover for their malicious and violent intentions. This interpretation

was necessary at first in order to avoid having to deal with the religious nature of the war on terror. But few pundits would now agree with this assessment. Indeed, 66% of conference members believed that al Qaeda leaders are profoundly religious. Their motivation derives from the Salafist tradition of violence and intolerance, but their impulses are almost certainly guided by their religious beliefs.

This evolution of thought leads to the most fundamental issue of the war: the question of reforming Islam. The tenets of Mohammed reach far, and their grasp includes every aspect of society: government, economics, personal and public morality, and culture. From the Muslim fundamentalist’s point of view, there is no such thing as “private” religion. To the contrary, the proper role of religion is to dictate to and inform every aspect of life, both public and private. Mohammed was an unapologetic totalitarian.

It is this comprehensive nature of fundamentalist Islam that confounds any attempt at compromise between Western societies and the Muslim world. Both Christianity and Judaism have matured through the ages to the point in which they have grudgingly adopted a culture of toleration and the privatization of religious convictions. To the Western mind, it remains abhorrent to suggest that any government or cleric should dictate religious beliefs to others. Indeed, to attempt to do so does violence to the purity of the religion itself. Having suffered through and irreversibly left behind the trauma of the religious wars of the 17th century, modern Christendom has come to embrace religious freedom, spiritual privacy, and the separation of church and state. The West cannot comprehend or tolerate totalitarian Islam.

Conversely, the fundamentalist Muslim cannot grasp the logic of the West. The notion that Islamic principles should be internalized and separated from public policy or government was described by



influential Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Qutb as *jahiliyya*, i.e., religious confusion and rebellion. Qutb lamented the Western world's transfer of sovereignty from God to man and viewed a forcible return to the rule of Islam as the only answer. From the point of view of his adherents, the role of religion is to control and regulate society and government. Religion is manifestly not a private matter, and to suggest otherwise is a denial of religion itself.

Two more diametrically opposed world views could not be imagined, and it is this fundamental disagreement that lies at the heart of the so-called war on terror. Compared to this ideological heart of the conflict, the tactical choice of terror as a weapon is transitory and of little consequence. To prevail in the greater conflict, America and her allies will have to turn their focus from opposing a tactic to dealing with an opposing world view.

In a similar vein, there is a body of thought that continues to emphasize the enemy's tactical methodology over its strategic essence. Specifically, the currently popular concept known as "4th Generation Warfare" is an entirely tactical discussion that often intrudes into conferences on strategy. This trend reflects a large sector of the defense community that tends to be distracted by the enemy's asymmetric approach to tactics, to the point that to them the salient feature of the GWOT is its tactical asymmetry. This is an entirely inappropriate and ineffective way of thinking about strategy, and it guarantees solution sets that fail to rise above tactical methods and means.

Other Roots of Conflict

The final determination of the nature of the war must transcend any simplistic fixation on a single issue. The essential disconnect in world views between Islamic fundamentalists and the West is certainly the main problem, and it is exacerbated by the general economic and political failure of the Middle East. But there are peripheral issues that also affect the strategic landscape: American involvement in the Middle East, the good versus

evil construct of the war, and the psychological/ sociological aspects of terrorism. We must continuously examine the nature, motivations, and consequences of American involvement in the Middle East. Some observers point to the presence of American troops in the region as the single most provocative issue in the minds of the terrorists. The alliance between the United States and Israel will remain a touchstone of the problem, and American foreign policy will no doubt continue to walk the tightrope between supporting Israel and garnering support among Arabs. While it is inconceivable that any administration would opt for one extreme or the other along this spectrum—either abandoning Israel or supporting her completely—the dialectic serves to define the internal conflict between secularism and our Judeo-Christian heritage.

The Israel Connection

From a secular standpoint, which draws strength from the Jeffersonian construct of separating church and state, American support for Israel is hard to justify. On the surface, it seems to derive from racial or religious bigotry aimed at Arabs or Muslims. Although even a secularist could argue that support for the Jewish homeland is necessary as a counterweight to historical anti-Semitism—most especially the Holocaust of World War II—Israeli provocations against Arabs since 1967 argue in the other direction. Again, one could argue that Israel's example of a functioning representative government is worth supporting in itself, but as democratization grows in the region, that argument will also lose strength. In short, a total separation from American religious values and traditions would remove the foundation from American support for Israel.

The other side of the argument—often given voice from American conservatives—is that while the United States led the world toward freedom of religion from our foundation, that tenet is not synonymous with freedom from religion. Rather, our country's policies should be guided (without apology) by our decidedly Judeo-Christian heritage.



While most of our founding fathers favored separation of church and state, they also were mostly Christian, so that a proper understanding of the American Constitution leads to absolute respect for individual privacy in matters of faith but also to an acceptance of our collective traditions related to the Christian faith. While many variations of Christianity have viewed Jews differently—some virulently anti-Semitic—in general the nation should maintain a friendly and sustained support for Israel. Taking their cue from the Genesis account, many Christian Americans remember God's promise to the progenitor of the Jewish race, Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse."


Good versus Evil

"Skinning this onion a bit further," we find the issue of good and evil. The secularist delights in deprecating any mention of such anachronistic terms and tends to dismiss as intellectually bankrupt anyone who suggests the existence of moral absolutes. The religious viewpoint, conversely, sees any foreign policy not grounded in basic morality as suspicious if not downright debased. As with the Israel question, politicians will almost invariably take the middle road. An American official who wholly embraces the war on terror as good versus evil will quickly be labeled a "crusader" and be ostracized by the world community. Conversely, if he ignores such value judgments entirely, he misses the opportunity to tap into the moral strength of most Americans. Equating the enemy's reprehensible conduct—televised beheadings, kidnappings, car bombings, and so on—with evil can serve to unify efforts and motivate citizen and soldier alike to sacrificial service. Hence, American foreign policy will almost certainly continue to express concepts of good and evil while simultaneously avoiding a clear enumeration of any particular moral code.

Integrating the good/evil construct into the war effort also helps both society in general and the military in particular to moderate their behavior. It is an unfortunate trend in history that the passions of war lead to excesses in violence, hatred, and vengeance. The Abu Ghraib Prison fiasco is the most conspicuous evidence of the danger, but the response by the government and people of the United States deprecated the behavior of the prison guards as inappropriate and inconsistent with our otherwise good intentions. The military services invest a considerable amount of training to inculcate restraint and ethical behavior, and a strategic vision that aligns the nation's efforts with beneficent intentions reinforces these efforts.

Psychological and Sociological Aspects to the Conflict

Finally, when dealing comprehensively with the nature of the war on terror, there are tertiary issues, such as human psychology and sociology that bear on the problem. The religious and political motivations of Usama bin Laden are obviously of great import, but he is also the youngest of twenty sons of a Yemeni construction magnate who was killed when bin Laden was eleven years old, and the only son of his Syrian mother. Growing up in Saudi Arabia, he was at once fabulously wealthy and socially an outsider. In his thirties he self-actualized in the Afghan struggle against the Soviet Union, and he managed to convince himself that he and his compatriots were the primary cause of the defeat of the Soviet Union and its eventual collapse—conveniently forgetting the role of American money and missiles in their successful guerilla war. The now pious emir was reputed to have engaged in quite a different life style as a young man, and if moral guilt plays a part in his loathing of the West, it would not be the first time that baser instinct masqueraded as piety. Now a middle-aged man carving out an historical legacy for himself, bin Laden is a case study in antisocial psychology.



At the tactical level of the global war on terror, we also find a seemingly endless supply of young men (and not a few women) able and willing to detonate explosive belts around their waists or packed in the back seats of their cars. Religion plays a part in the creation of this fanaticism, but so also does bribery, blackmail, and, on occasion, human stupidity—as when drivers who expected to walk away from a car bomb before detonation find themselves the victims of vicious remote control. Conversely, the London bombers of July 2005 appear to include men who were educated and well integrated into British society. The caricature of a terrorist as a young, unemployed, religious fanatic simply does not apply to many of those involved in terror today. A systematic approach to unraveling the puzzle of terrorism's most peculiar weapon, the suicide bomber, must consider the psychological and sociological dimensions to the problem.

What Is the Enemy's Strategy?

It is impossible to inquire concerning the enemy's strategy without determining which behavior model we are dealing with. Of the many extant models, three seem most appropriate for analyzing enemy strategy in the war on terror: the rational actor model, the political actor model, and the organizational model.

The rational actor model is most useful in looking at al Qaeda's senior leadership, who among the enemy are the most vocal concerning their strategic goals. Usama bin Laden embraces the Salafist tradition, which looks to the past greatness of the Islamic caliphate and deprecates most modern Islamic regimes as corrupt. His short-term goals aim at the destruction of the Saudi royal government and its replacement by a purer form of Islamic rule. He also seeks the replacement of other Muslim regimes in the Middle East, especially those deemed to have compromised with the West.

In order to accomplish these goals, bin Laden has embraced a strategy of defeating the "far enemy," i.e.,

America, whose main sins are supporting corrupt Islamic regimes in order to rob Muslims of their resources (principally oil) and aiding Israel. Al Qaeda seeks to kill as many Americans and their allies as possible, bring about an economic disruption, and so convince the American government to disengage from the Middle East. Bin Laden's missives declaring jihad against Americans quote liberally from 15th century scholar ibn Tamiya, who believed that any Islamic government that compromised with infidels was apostate. It became the duty of all Muslims to oppose such regimes. Bin Laden was also strongly influenced by the writings of Egyptian radical Sayed Qutb, who despised Western culture and called for a return to the purity of Islam as the only answer to the world's woes.

Part of the al Qaeda strategy is to unite the Ummah—the community of Muslims. The challenge, of course, is that many factions and groups within Islam do not support the Salafist goals of bin Laden. In response to the essential disunity of the Ummah, bin Laden has taken steps aimed at reconciliation in some ways. He seems willing to overlook the Shia–Sunni split for the time being, which addresses perhaps the biggest rift in Islam. But in many other ways, bin Laden's organization has acted in ways that alienate them from other Muslims. Early in the war, al Qaeda made it clear that their operations would kill innocent Muslims, and they developed a theology to excuse themselves for their murders. Al Qaeda continues to insist that every good Muslim must be actively engaged in fighting the West and the apostate regimes—forcing each individual to choose sides and condemning those who decide not to fight. The Muslim backlash against this form of fascism and the murders that result has been surprisingly slow and small scale so far, probably because al Qaeda remains the underdog in the fight against the West. But when Muslim clerics in Spain declared a fatwa condemning bin Laden and accusing him of abandoning Islam, they demonstrated a trend that could eventually deal a death blow to al Qaeda.




Among the strategic options available to the enemy is that of actively replacing the so-called apostate regimes—especially Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, and/or Iraq. There seems to be little written guidance from al Qaeda as to how this is to be accomplished. Most likely scenarios would involve massive popular revolts ranging from civil disobedience to guerilla campaigns and terrorism aimed at causing the governments to flee. As unlikely as this might be, given the iron hand with which Cairo, Riyadh, and Damascus rule, it seems even more inconceivable that a functioning replacement government could take over—one that would be acceptable to al Qaeda and their sympathizers. Any such linkage between a successor government and the terrorists would result in the global and regional isolation of the offending rulers. We will look at this issue again when we deal with strategic end states below.

A more likely scenario for dealing with the apostate regimes would be for al Qaeda to influence smaller scale changes through blackmail, intimidation, and bribery. Both Egypt and Saudi Arabia already go far in trying to placate Islamic radicals, and their sensitivity to the illegitimacy of their regimes makes them vulnerable to influence peddling. Any governmental decisions deemed to be anti-West could then be applauded as victories by the Salafists, even as they continue to officially condemn the regimes involved. By working through existing governments to force the removal of offending Western influence, the terrorists would have the advantage of using instruments of power already acknowledged as legitimate in the UN if not among the Ummah. Although some pundits worry about the collapse of Middle Eastern regimes and their replacement by radical governments, I think it much more likely that the enemy will adapt its strategy to working through existing regimes.

The Bush Administration's National Security Strategy rightly noted that the most dangerous potential threat occurs with the combination of terrorism and

technology. Al Qaeda is actively seeking to make or acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD). If they demonstrate that they have attained the capability to deploy such weapons, their ability to blackmail or otherwise disrupt opposing governments increases dramatically. WMD will also help to shape enemy operations, because they can potentially solve the tactical dilemmas that plague al Qaeda planning: the difficulty of achieving spectacular results on the one hand or doing nothing on the other. Since 9/11 there have been no major terrorist actions within the United States. Some believe that the absence of major attacks indicates a loss of capability (and thus credibility) by al Qaeda. According to this interpretation, it becomes imperative for the enemy to score some notable tactical successes in order to demonstrate their continued viability. But with conventional weapons, it takes multiple, coordinated strikes to generate the shock value of a 9/11 scale attack. As internal defenses in the United States and elsewhere harden, the coordination of multiple attacks becomes problematic. Thus, WMD can solve the problem by allowing the enemy to achieve a dramatic result through a single attack.

These strategic goals are in accordance with the rational actor model, particularly for the senior leadership of al Qaeda. But there are other dynamics at work beyond bin Laden's strategic chess game. Political dynamics are clearly shaping the course of enemy strategic thinking. Bin Laden's decision to assimilate the efforts of Jordanian terrorist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and join forces with him was a political decision. Zarqawi, like bin Laden, was an "Afghan Arab," who returned to Jordan after fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan only to spend seven years in jail for conspiracy. He fled to Europe after his release and was implicated in heading up an insurgent cell in Germany—one that was thought to be a rival of al Qaeda. By 2001 he was back in Afghanistan running training camps but then fled to Iraq, where he linked up with Ansar al-Islam—a Kurdish insurgent group. Since then he has been



implicated as the mastermind of numerous terrorist assaults in Iraq and throughout the Middle East.

In a sense, bin Laden's hand was forced. He had to accept Zarqawi as a part of al Qaeda because not to do so would have made the Jordanian a powerful rival within the Islamic world. But by bringing Zarqawi into the organization, bin Laden had to live with his erstwhile rival's actions—including televised beheadings, kidnappings, and indiscriminate killing of Muslims in Iraq. Zarqawi, according to the infamous letter he allegedly tried to send to bin Laden (released by American authorities in February 2004), is using violence against Shias to ignite sectarian violence in Iraq—a tactical innovation that seems to fly in the face of al Qaeda's desire to unite Muslims.

The political dynamics of al Qaeda are a major feature of their strategic organization. Al Qaeda is, after all, the “base” from which other Islamic insurgent groups are to operate. This fundamental decentralization gives the enemy operational resilience but it also complicates strategic formulation. As bin Laden plays his chess game, he finds that his pieces often have a will of their own.

In considering models of behavior we must consider the perspective of the organizational behavior model—especially as it impacts on the lower rank and file of Islamic terrorists and other operatives. Despite a careful enumeration of religious goals and strategic objectives among the leadership of enemy insurgent groups, there are baser instincts also at work. Because Islamic terrorists are in the minority and outside of legitimate authorities, much of their activity is simply nihilistic: anything that attacks the establishment is favorable. In examining the psychology of suicide bombers, it is unlikely that we will find well thought-out theologies or cold-blooded strategic calculations. Rather, we find in the mind of the fanatic the excitement, fear, and blind determination of the psyched-out. In some cases, we find a fatalistic mercenary, willing to throw away an otherwise unproductive life in order to bequeath money to his family. The senior leadership of al Qaeda

and associated groups have successfully tapped into this perverse resource: the psychologically vulnerable Islamic youth. From the days of 11th century Persian Al-Hassam and his use of hashish and deception to create a corps of fanatic killers, Islamic youths have seemed particularly malleable. It has become a peculiar facet of Middle Eastern culture that so many men, and sometimes women, are willing to kill themselves in suicide attacks. It remains a critically needed area of study—beyond the scope of this essay—to determine why this proclivity for self-destruction exists and how to counter it. But the overall trend is apparent: a key feature in the enemy's strategy is their co-opting of the organizational impulse toward nihilism among Muslim populations.

The enemy's actions since the 1990s reveal a remarkable capacity for tactical innovation and operational flexibility but little coherent strategic thought. Strategy formulation among the terrorists and their allies seems schizophrenic at best. Compared to classical Maoist strategy, in which the insurgent leaders carefully craft each phase of operations with a view to an eventual transition to power, the Islamic radicals seem to have little practical vision for ruling. Ferocious and determined, like a dog chasing a car, they do not appear to have a good plan for what to do beyond the thrill of the chase. Indeed, informed observers differ as to whether bin Laden and his cronies are trying to effect real change in global and regional politics or whether they are simply trying to jump-start the apocalypse. The unrestrained violence and cruelty of the enemy seems to point more toward a supernatural outcome than to a realistic political goal. Terrorists thrive on secrecy and invisibility but governance requires public presence. The experience of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, recently elected president of Iran, is instructive. The suspicion that he participated in the capture and holding of American hostages in the crisis of 1979 will likely diminish his ability to deal with western (especially American) leaders. If a regime associated with al Qaeda emerged to take power in a Middle



Eastern country, it is inconceivable that it would be accepted as a legitimate government by the rest of the non-Islamic world.

If enemy strategic formulation is truly defunct, then it follows that America and her allies should focus on exploiting that strategic weakness rather than opposing the enemy's tactics or operational methods. Unfortunately, the American strategy as it has evolved so far appears fixated on combating terrorism and insurgency. We give a great deal of thought to defeating improvised explosive devices (IEDs) but less thought to how to formulate a comprehensive strategy.

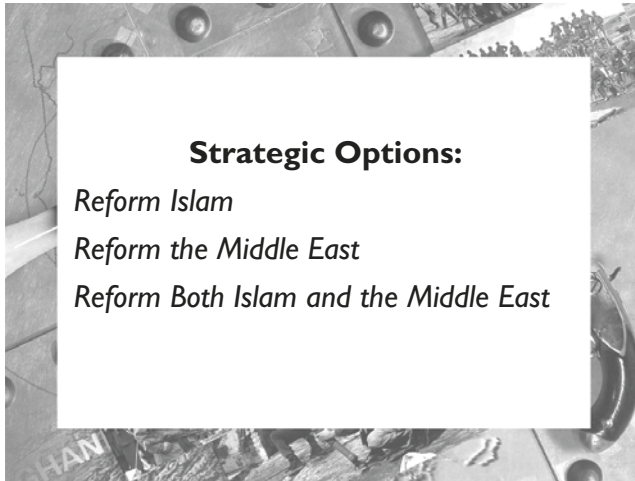
What Are Our Best Strategic Options?

Among the most compelling strategic options for America is that of reforming Islam. It is a contentious idea—one that seems to some a most logical necessity and to others the zenith of Western arrogance and irreverence. Reform of Islam means nothing short of acting to change religious ideas and beliefs. To encourage Muslims to accept freedom of religion as a bona fide civil right means discrediting the fundamentalist view that Islam must control all aspects of community life, both private and public. It requires the defeat of the idea that Muslim leaders have the right and duty to enforce Islamic tenets on society as a whole. Reform of Islam, in short, requires a wrestling match between Thomas Jefferson and Sayed Qtub—two founding fathers of ideologies that are diametrically opposed. It would be improbable and unwise for religious reform to be at the forefront of America's foreign policy in the war on terror, but there must be some effort along these lines. Given the fractious nature of Islamic religious thought, our strategy must include low-level campaigns aimed at championing religious interpretation that tends toward our political and security goals.

Closely associated with the idea of reforming Islam is that of reforming the Middle East. American policy makers are much more comfortable with this idea because it involves primarily political and economic reform and leaves the religious question ostensibly untouched. The 22-member states of the Arab League—comprising lands greater in size than the United States or Europe, and a population of 300 million—have a combined GDP that is half that of California. The economic order has huge gaps between the few ultra-rich and the poverty-stricken masses. The birth rate remains very high and contributes to sustained poverty. The status of women and human rights in general is worse than that of 19th century Europe. The number of books published annually throughout the region is less than that of Greece; 300 million Arabs produce fewer scientific essays each year than six million Israelis. In short, the region is in dire need of political, economic, and social reform. But the distinction between seeking to change Islam or the region of the Middle East is in some measure a chimera, because any attempt at instilling democracy constitutes an assault on Islamic rule. But within the notion of reforming the region there is great scope for modernization and economic advancement, with the goal of ameliorating conditions that lead to anti-American or nihilistic behaviors.

The question remains—to what degree and how should the West try to reform the Islamic world? More specifically, how should it reform the Middle Eastern Islam? The distinction is important, because major outposts of Islam already exist in places other than the Middle East, and consequent change in these peripheral expressions of Muslim beliefs is obvious. Indonesian Islam is quite different from that found in the Middle East, and it continues to develop and evolve while simultaneously assimilating non-Muslim historical traditions and cultures. Similarly, many Muslims in America and Europe have accepted

the Western idea of the privatization of religious belief. The Wahhabi movement, with its ideology of compelling obedience to a strict interpretation of Islam, does not thrive universally throughout the periphery of the Muslim world.



Only about 20% of the world's Muslims are Arab, yet Arabic is the language of the Koran, and Arabia remains the ideological heart of Islam. Consequently, what may appear to be Muslim grievances and concerns are often merely expressions of Arab discontent. The relatively abysmal state of Arab politics and economics—a major cause of violent impulses—is not reflected universally throughout the rest of Islam. Whereas Arab Muslims tend to be rigid in matters of politics, culture, and religious interpretation, non-Arab Muslims often demonstrate much greater flexibility. With the population trends as they are, it seems inevitable that peripheral Islam will gradually acquire greater influence over the heartland.

Approaching the Reform Question

But is it possible to cause or influence reform in the heart of Islam? The consensus within the United States is yes. As to the efficacy of change in the Middle East, estimates vary from predictions of massive instability followed by the collapse of failed

regimes to a gradual and peaceful democratization of the region followed by the withering away of radicalism. If change is possible, there remains the question of how to effect it.

Current US efforts aim at championing democracy throughout the Middle East. Recent impulses toward representative government among the Palestinian Arabs, in Lebanon, and in Iraq seem to indicate at least some popular sentiment for moving toward democracy. The American role in this process is to advise, assist, and support such movements. Aid packages, trade deals, security arrangements, and diplomatic leverage are crucial tools as the United States tries to cajole Arab and Muslim populations into accepting democracy and the open civil society associated with that democracy. A majority of conference attendees—83%—believed that the struggle against terrorism would become more a political and economic effort and less a military one in years to come. About 75% believed that there were a majority of Muslim moderates in the Middle East who could engage in routine peaceful competition within the international community if they could wrest control from the radicals. Political reform would be the major weapon in achieving this result.

The global view on democracy's chances in the Islamic world shows a clear evolution of strategic thought over the past four years. Immediately after 9/11 there was a large body of opinion that Islamic culture simply could not assimilate democracy and that to try to import it from without was culturally blind and doomed to failure. Hiding behind a veneer of political correctness, this viewpoint came close to asserting that Arabs were somehow a less developed race incapable of self-rule. The Bush Administration took on that idea and utterly rejected it in their National Security Strategy of 2002:



“In the twenty-first century, only nations that share a commitment to protecting basic human rights and guaranteeing political and economic freedom will be able to unleash the potential of their people and assure their future prosperity. People everywhere want to be able to speak freely; choose who will govern them; worship as they please; educate their children—male and female; own property; and enjoy the benefits of their labor. These values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society....”

It is hard to imagine a statement that is more self-assured or less sensitive to cultural differences. But it represents a viewpoint that seems to be in the ascendancy both globally and in the Middle East itself.

Fundamentalist Islamists contend that democracy is evil because it seeks to split the Ummah into conflicting parties. One recent sermon noted that “Mohammed did not run for office or win any political debate. He won the war against the infidel.” In the war of ideas between the West and fundamentalist Muslims, one of the key battlegrounds will be establishing the legitimacy of democracy. Americans must transcend the culturally biased assumption that democracy has some inherent divine goodness and instead investigate how to sell the concept to a culture that views it as religious confusion.


Conversely, one of the salient difficulties in promoting democratic reform is the fact that the United States continues to pursue good relations with autocratic regimes in the region. Our relations with Egypt, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia are the most obvious examples of this apparent hypocrisy. There are many ways to excuse this behavior as a necessary and temporary evil, but it remains one of the most offending aspects of American policy to Usama bin Laden and his cohorts. The Bush Administration has been quick to point to whatever small-scale moves toward democracy might occur within these non-democratic regimes, but the exigencies of regional

and global security arrangements, not to mention the oil question, will ensure that our relationships remain intact for the foreseeable future.

Along with working directly on Middle Eastern reform, there is a less directed but perhaps greater sustained effort by Muslim communities on the periphery to influence change within the heartland. Ralph Peters, among others, points to the rich Islamic culture in Indonesia, in Europe, and in America and calls for a strategy of reforming Islam from without. The American role in such an effort would perforce be an indirect one, but we should continue to sponsor international Muslim cooperation that aims toward modernizing Islam and moving it beyond the fanaticism that springs from the sands of Arabia.

Championing the rights of women should be at the forefront of efforts to reform the Muslim world, both within the Middle East and on the periphery. Elevating women in our initiatives serves to rally political support among Western countries, legitimates our other efforts, and strikes directly at the heart of radical Islam. Women who enter the work force and politics can simultaneously benefit the economy and help to moderate the hate-mongering of the wizened old men who completely dominate the ranks of fundamentalist clerics. Enemy reactions against such efforts—particularly violence directed against women—will serve to further vilify and isolate the radicals.

Finally, reform efforts must take on the massive problem of corruption in the developing world. Ralph Peters has articulated the problem well, and he points to corruption as one of the chief obstacles to progress, and not only within the Islamic world. On the heels of the largest scandal in the history of the UN—the Oil-for-Food disaster—it is becoming increasingly clear that Western governments must become more heavy-handed in supervising aid distribution. The goal must be that every dollar,



franc, and deutsche mark is accounted for. Age-old bribery schemes and the impunity of corrupt government officials are as dangerous to the cause as nuclear warheads. Future aid packages must be predicated on full, open accounting.

The Log in Our Own Eye

In considering American strategic options, we must deal with the question of changing those policies that most provoke reaction in the Islamic world. Foremost of those policies is America's role in supporting Israel—a policy that, as described above, has deep domestic implications for Americans. The Israeli connection is an easy target in considering change in American foreign policy, but less than half of conference attendees thought that resolution of the Palestinian question would really help matters. Professor Haim Hariri commented on the relation of Israel and violence in the Middle East:

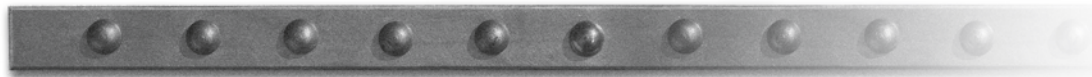
"Israel and any problems related to it, in spite of what you might read or hear in the world media, is not the central issue, and has never been the central issue in the upheaval in the region. Yes, there is a 100 year-old Israeli-Arab conflict, but it is not where the main show is. The millions who died in the Iran-Iraq war had nothing to do with Israel. The mass murder happening right now in Sudan, where the Arab Moslem regime is massacring its black Christian citizens, has nothing to do with Israel. The frequent reports from Algeria about the murders of hundreds of civilians in one village or another by other Algerians have nothing to do with Israel. Saddam Hussein did not invade Kuwait, endanger Saudi Arabia and butcher his own people because of Israel. Egypt did not use poison gas against Yemen in the 60's because of Israel. Assad the Father did not kill tens of thousands of his own citizens in one week in El Hamma in Syria because of Israel. The Taliban control of Afghanistan and the civil war there had nothing to do with Israel. The Libyan blowing up of the Pan-Am flight had nothing to do with Israel, and I could go on and on and on."

Although it remains a convenient and emotional issue, most believed that if a true peace were achieved, Muslim radicals would either not accept the solution or would find some other cause for anti-American hate-mongering. This interpretation argues for continuing a balanced approach in Palestine.

The continuing war in Iraq and, to a lesser degree, in Afghanistan is also an obvious aspect of our Middle Eastern foreign policy that bears examination. But again, simple formulas do not seem promising. For every pundit declaring the need for Americans to get out of Iraq, another points out that in the resulting vacuum of power the Iraqi government would collapse. The removal of American troops would by most accounts be damaging both to Middle Eastern prospects for democratic reform and to American credibility. With Europe unwilling or unable to step up to the plate in a big way, the continued American presence in the region seems inevitable. Others suggest that American armed forces ought to stay in the region in order to provide diplomatic leverage with other troublesome regimes, most notably Syria and Iran. In the event of a collapse of the Saudi government, American forces might need to protect our interests there as well.

While these main policies—support for Israel and intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan—are thus not likely to change, there is scope for mitigating American provocation in the Muslim world. Increasing cultural understanding—particularly of sub-national (family/tribal) politics—and furthering fluency in Arabic would both go a long way to engendering trust in the region. Increasing contact and influence within Arab media, especially newspapers and television, would help us to transmit the American viewpoint to Muslims. Avoidance of major polarizing events like the prison abuse at Abu Ghraib is, of course, crucial to winning regional and global support.

Perhaps the biggest issue in considering American provocation is the question of expanding military operations in the Middle East. It is not inconceivable that American forces could strike Syria if Bashar



Assad's government continued to defy the United States by maintaining intelligence operatives in Lebanon or continuing to provide sanction for Iraqi insurgents. With the question of Iran's nuclear program still unresolved, some form of coercive military operations there is likewise possible. Such actions will always cause angry reaction in the region and in the world, the more so if America acts alone without the benefit of a UN mandate.

Finally, the avowed goal of reducing America's oil dependence is potentially provocative, although pundits avoid discussing the subject. If technological developments permitted Americans to replace oil consumption with solar power, hydrogen-based fuels, ethanol, or other solutions, the result would be highly disruptive to world markets. Indeed, it would represent a major reordering of the global economy and would almost certainly plunge the Middle East into turmoil. Even if the science of alternative energies proceeds gradually, private investment patterns are more volatile as they try to anticipate major trends. A perceived loss of confidence in oil markets could be highly disruptive. Nations whose economies are primarily oil-based would suddenly find sharply reduced revenues and almost instantaneous economic failure. Although these socio-economic dimensions of reducing oil dependency are not normally discussed, any actual move in that direction would have to include a plan for economic assistance to the Middle East.

Gathering Friends

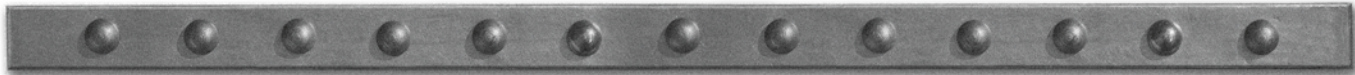
The Bush Administration's policy of preemptive war in Iraq represented a major challenge to the international order. It called into question the viability of the United Nations and the relevance of the European Union and its half-brother, NATO. As the American strategy continues to evolve, policy makers must consider the utility of existing alliances in preference to the creation of new systems of cooperation. During our conference, attendees

were evenly split over whether it would be more effective to work through existing institutions or create new organizations and alliances. The division of opinion was instructive, because the best solution is a combination of both approaches. With the prototype idea of President Bush's "coalition of the willing"—essentially a condemnation of UN vacillation and European timidity—a political dialectic was formed between old institutions and new requirements. World reaction to America's defiance of the UN has been followed by a tacit agreement that reform of the world body is imminent and necessary, particularly in light of the Oil-for-Food scandal.

American strategic formulation in the evolving war against terror should include a balance between working through existing structures and a willingness to forge new relationships. Both the UN and NATO were Cold War creations that developed institutional dynamics based on the bipolarity of that period. Both have shown reluctance and difficulty in relating to the changing nature of the world since 1989. Discarding such organizations would be needlessly provocative and damaging, but encouraging reform while showing a willingness to seek new alliances is a reasonable policy direction.

Vectoring Our Efforts

With regard to future military efforts, just over half of conference participants felt that operations will narrow as intelligence pinpoints and isolates specific networks of insurgents, while the remaining respondents believed the war would widen against uncooperative states—potentially Syria or Iran, or following regime collapse, Pakistan, Egypt, or Saudi Arabia. A third of the attendees called for acquiring more special forces capability within the military, while a similar number insisted that more troops were needed for stability operations. Despite the Department of Defense's intention to commit major resources to further development of air and



space capability, no conference attendees agreed with these priorities.

Along with military reform, most agreed that continued modernization of intelligence operations was the *sine qua non* of success in the war on terror. Tangential to that effort is the need for increased efficiency in interagency cooperation. Conference participants discussed the need for legislation similar to the Goldwater-Nichols Act (i.e., the Defense Reorganization Act) of 1986. While the threat of conventional war remains, most see irregular conflict as a perpetual threat demanding permanent reform in the Department of Defense and the other agencies of the government.

As to the targets of future military operations, there is almost universal consensus on the need to kill or capture terrorists as they are found. The continued disruption of terrorist cells and networks will require both military operations and law enforcement, wielded together through effective intelligence penetration of enemy organizations. This will remain the necessary and central tactic of the war, but by itself it will not be decisive. The other preoccupation for military planning will be counter-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. When intelligence resources pinpoint nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons or materials, national and coalition strategy must provide for their destruction or capture.

The most immediate challenges to counter-proliferation are North Korea and Iran. The United States is attempting a multilateral approach to both issues, counting on cooperation with China in the former case and Europe in the latter. There is a strong possibility that either or both may fail in their efforts to curb the nuclear ambitions of these two prominent members of the “axis of evil.” In that event, America and the world will have to decide what to do—either learn to live with these two new nuclear powers or take whatever steps may be necessary to eradicate the problem.

Obviously the best outcome would be a negotiated, systematic solution that would provide for verifiable deconstruction of nuclear weapons programs. On the other end of the spectrum of possibilities are strategic raids similar to Israel’s destruction of Iraq’s Osirak nuclear facility near Baghdad in 1981. Israel’s highly effective tactical strike destroyed an easily targeted building—one not yet actively producing nuclear material and thus not a danger to its surroundings when destroyed. But the permanent destruction of Saddam Hussein’s nuclear program required the disruption that occurred with the first Gulf War of 1990–91, the weapons embargo that followed, and ultimately Operational Iraqi Freedom, which, if nothing else, verifiably separated Saddam Hussein from nuclear weapons.

As policy makers consider military strikes against North Korea or Iran, we cannot allow tactical feasibility to trump strategic suitability. The destruction of a facility does not necessarily lead to the permanent deconstruction of an enemy nuclear weapons program. Instead, it leads most directly to a reorganization of weapons procurement, fueled by renewed animosity. Even if our counter-proliferation strategy has recourse to tactical strikes, we must develop a comprehensive, systematic, and long-term program that accounts for subterfuge, dispersion of facilities, and innovation.

The Information War

The final aspect of developing American strategic options is the information dimension. Most commentators on the war against terror deprecate America’s lack of skill in communicating effectively with the Islamic world. The failure is not due to a lack of trying. But there is ample evidence that we fail to communicate particularly in one key aspect: countering radical Islamic propaganda. There is an impulse among Americans not to wade into these waters at all. The blatant lies within some Arab media are so nonsensical as to be regarded as silly and juvenile to Americans. The classic example was



the infamous “Baghdad Bob”—Saddam Hussein’s Minister of Information, Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf, who continued to insist in April 2003 that American forces were not within 100 miles of the capital city while cameras showed GIs and tanks in the streets. Our culture of openness, free press, and respect for truth and fact leaves most Americans gaping in disbelief that anyone could take such efforts at disinformation seriously, but this inability to grasp the power of the lie in the Middle East is a serious weakness.

Just as America and the West have internalized democracy to the point that we assume it to be almost a divinely commissioned good thing, so also we have a culture that deifies fact, logic, and rationality. We live in a society that exposes any assertion—scientific, social, religious, or political—to the scrutiny of unlimited inquiry. Facts rule supreme; they topple dogmas, theories, systems, and regimes. Our mistake is in believing that our love of objective fact is mirrored in the Islamic world. Instead, thriving in the sustained failure of the Middle East, we find societies that cannot welcome the chaos of free inquiry and that desperately need to blame someone for all the woes of the world. Objectivity is a cold, unappealing commodity when compared with the attractiveness of myths that allow one to affix responsibility for failure on some hapless foreigner. Central to understanding Middle Eastern culture is recognition of the pervasive victim mentality of the Arab. It is a perspective that eschews fact and embraces any myth that points the finger at someone else: the Jew, the infidel, the apostate. The myth becomes so compelling—excusing everything, explaining everything—that fact cannot compete.

The Arab media thrives on propagating myth, and because they use a language not well known in the West, they do not often have to face competition for the attention of the audience. There are major portions of the Arab population that believe 9/11


never happened or that it was the product of a Jewish conspiracy. Many believe that the Holocaust was a Jewish fabrication, and that American actions invariably emanate from some nefarious plot designed to destroy Islam. It isn’t about what’s true; it’s about what people *want* to believe.

This is a difficult arena to fight in, but part of our strategy in the war on terror must address it. Specifically, America needs a minister of information whose job is to ferret out the lies and myths circulating in the Middle East and combat them with truth. We cannot necessarily convince, but we can foster doubt. The modernization of the Middle East must include the creation of a renewed objectivity—in matters of science, religion, and politics. The so-called “war of ideas” cannot be a clever add-on to a military campaign. It must be at the center of the entire strategy.

What Is the End State?

Among conference attendees 46% felt that the global war on terror would last decades, 30% believed it would last only years, but 21% predicted that it would remain a feature of our national security efforts in perpetuity. If there is to be an “end” to the global war on terror, what might the end look like? We examined several scenarios.

One of the most likely sequels is that the GWOT simply fades slowly. Unlike the conventional wars we are more comfortable with, the GWOT will not end with a surrender nor with a victory parade through Manhattan. Instead, it will likely decline in importance and perhaps be overtaken by the emergence of another security challenge, such as renewed conflict between China and the United States. The American political process, with its potential change of administration every four years, facilitates this change of priorities. While many of Lyndon Johnson’s innovations and priorities in his War on Poverty became systematized, the



war itself faded with the man because the Nixon Administration brought other challenges and goals to the forefront of American politics. In a similar manner, the GWOT may well diminish in importance when the Bush Administration ends.

At the other end of the spectrum, some foresee the collapse of regimes in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or other Middle Eastern states and their replacement by radical governments. As stated above, this sequel seems less likely than some fear. Massive popular revolt and the chaos that might follow may certainly occur, but this does not *ipso facto* lead to the establishment of a radical regime. And even if it did, the United States and her allies are much better prepared to deal with a state regime than they are with a shadowy network of insurgents. States have to interact with the international community, and they can be cajoled or coerced much more easily than invisible terrorists can be. Statehood implies some measure of responsibility to the world community, and the attainment of legitimate, recognized power can have a moderating influence on the behavior of the most avowed radical. Following his election to the presidency of Iran, for example, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad stated that his reputation as a hard-liner was exaggerated and that he intends to work within the framework of the international community.

Another 9/11?

Among the more discouraging and more likely possible outcomes of the war on terror would be a catastrophic attack on America, possibly with WMD. Some pundits and officials believe such an attack is inevitable, the more so because the current administration seems to acquiesce in lax border security. If such an attack does occur, the deleterious effects, beyond the obvious loss of life, would include severe economic disruption, political turmoil, and social upheaval. A sharp reduction of capital investment and a loss of public confidence could cause stock markets here and abroad to plunge, eventually resulting in job losses and bankruptcies for critically hit businesses. Such an

attack would certainly lead to bitter political infighting to discover who was to blame for failed security arrangements, particularly if the attack were to coincide with congressional or presidential elections. Renewed ethnic violence against foreigners and Muslims would likely result in a large loss of life.

If the enemy can convince enough of the world's governments that the *Pax Americana* is over, it is conceivable that an entirely new international order might develop—with poles in the European Union and China. This is precisely the effect that bin Laden's organization would like to bring about because it would remove the strongest pillar of support for the apostate regimes. While the secondary and tertiary effects on the Middle East and Islam would doubtless be hard, al Qaeda has not demonstrated much concern for such considerations in the past. The nihilistic impulses of radicalism would lead bin Laden and his followers to rejoice in the destruction and then blame others for the consequences of that destruction.

Within the United States, the combination of existing debt, trade deficits, and sudden disruption could threaten the entire economy and lead to a replay of the Great Depression. After one successful WMD attack, the Administration would be compelled to all but close the borders of the United States, and civil liberties would doubtless suffer as well. A second Patriot Act might start to look more like the Alien and Sedition Acts of John Adams' Administration. It is even conceivable that renewed assaults on privacy could spark massive civil insurrection, which in turn could serve as a catalyst for the expression of long-suppressed hatreds within American society.

Inoculation Against Terror

To protect against the possibility of this darkest sequel to the war on terror, a strategy of inoculation would have to concentrate on counter-cyclical economic investment and taxation policies and the rationalization of the balance between civil liberties



and national security. To be successful, inoculation must precede the catastrophic attack. The more this nation's political discourse normalizes discussion of potential catastrophe, the less an actual attack will be able to shock the citizenry. Hence, the nation's most compelling strategic option is to improve security to the point that a large-scale attack is too difficult to plan and organize without exposing the perpetrators to our intelligence efforts, while simultaneously working to prepare the country for the economic, political, and social effects of a successful strike against us.

Of the happier sequels, a renewed international order that features agreements for the suppression of terrorism and hate-mongering would be a possibility. Madrassas and mosques that preach anti-Americanism furnish a considerable number of terrorists and insurgents for the enemy's cause. Before 9/11 Saudi funding of exported Wahhabism was far enough below the American radar screen as to thrive unnoticed. But efforts since then have caused the Saudi government to begin closer management of funding schemes emanating from within their borders. Although it is difficult to

map the all the finances of Islamic organizations, future treaty relations between Islamic regimes and America must include measures to cut off funding of terror and narrow-minded religious schools. In place of the current madrassas, future American diplomatic initiatives will call for broader-based education and work force development

Treaties for speedy extradition of terrorists and multilateral agreements on the legal status and handling of detainees will go a long way toward unifying efforts to suppress terror. Legal reform is also a necessary and inevitable part of the evolution of strategy in the war on terror. Revered principles of the Geneva/Hague Conventions will ultimately have to be revised and updated. Blind insistence on the sanctity of such international agreements tends to forget or ignore that the same laws that seek to govern modern conflict also dictate rules concerning the use of missiles fired from balloons. The end state in the war on terror must get beyond such anachronisms and develop new protocols that are acceptable to and signed and adhered to by all sides in the conflict.



CONCLUSION

The purpose of this essay was to examine how strategy in the global war on terror will likely evolve. Sophisticated and effective strategic formulation must transcend the simplistic idea that our initial strategy will continue to pertain, but instead anticipate and direct its evolution. Just as the Lincoln Administration developed a flexibility in the face of repeated setbacks and so developed in the end a

war-winning strategy against the Confederacy, so also policy makers must expect future setbacks in the war on terror and adjust our strategies appropriately when the social, political, and cultural context allows. The enemy has demonstrated remarkable innovation and adaptability. What remains to be seen is whether we can show equal flexibility and skill in prosecuting an effective, multi-dimensional war against them.