
Chapter 2

**Ideological Support:
Attacking the Critical Linkage**

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Clausewitz said that the most important task of the leader is to understand the enterprise, to understand its true nature.¹ This global war on terror has a popular label, a political label, but it is not accurate. Terrorism is a means of power projection, a weapon, a tool of war. This is no more a war on terrorism than World War II was a war on submarines. This is not merely semantics. Words have meaning, and these words are leading us to the wrong concept. United States (U.S.) strategists attempting to defeat the terrorist threat to the U.S. must first understand its nature. Refining the problem and using the appropriate elements of national power to address its center of gravity will bring measurable success and support from partner nations.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, tactically and operationally, we have never been better. Our junior leadership is able to adapt and innovate on the fly. Conventional units are doing tasks reserved for special operations years ago. Corporals integrate fire team fire and maneuver with Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) in real time. We routinely move small cities of populations in and out of theater with complex relief in place operations under fire. We are winning battles, but what about the war? Is the enemy weaker, or are our actions missing the center of gravity of the enemy and bolstering its ideological strength?

Understanding the Enemy

The current threat is an insurgency, a popular movement that seeks to change the status quo through violence, subversion, propaganda, terrorism or other military action. But it is different from the nationalist insurgencies the United States has fought in the past. This one is global, and thoroughly

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by M. Howard and P. Paret, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1984, 88.

networked, as a result of modern technology. It is ideologically driven, fundamentalist and extremist. The key insurgent leaders are Muslim, but they do not speak for Islam. They threaten to hijack Islam for their purposes. All insurgencies have local or national aims and grievances. But a new class of regional and global actors has emerged and linked these movements in a global network. It's a network of ideology, financiers, document forgers, transportation experts, propagandists, family relationships, cultural groups, operations experts, logisticians, and others. It does include Al-Qa'eda, Jemaah Islamiah, and other affiliated "theater" movements. Their jihad is a confederation of movements exploited and linked by regional and global fundamentalist extremist insurgents. They "think globally and act locally."

The enemy has a powerful virtual component as the primary method of internal and external communication. Collectively, within the minds of its adherents, it functions as a "virtual caliphate," guided by an extremist ideology fueled with a unique strain of militant Islam. *The center of gravity, the decisive terrain of this war, is the vast majority of people not directly involved, but whose support, willing or coerced, is necessary to insurgent operations around the world.*

Terrorism is only one of the tools the insurgents are using, just as submarines and airplanes were tools of World War II. The "war on terrorism" label also sets a very high standard for success, and an infinite duration. Any successful terrorist attack means that we failed. The odds are pretty high against 100 percent success for the indefinite future. This war started well before we noticed it. Through the last 21 years of the twentieth century, the United States was attacked repeatedly and failed to react, or at least react effectively. I am speaking of the Iranian hostage crisis, the Beirut Marine Barracks attack, repeated aircraft hijackings, the destruction of U.S. embassies in east Africa, and the World Trade Center attack in 1993, an effort that was partially successful. But perhaps it was also an operational test.

It is important to pay attention to what the terrorist organizations say. In 1998 the World Islamic Front, popularly known as Al Qa'eda or "the base," issued a declaration of war against "Jews and crusaders." It said: "The

ruling to kill the Americans and their Allies—civilians and military— is an *individual* duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and the holy mosque in Mecca from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim.”²

Shortly after 9/11, Amion al-Zawahari, Al Qaeda’s operations officer, published a strategy paper that called for re-creation of the Muslim Caliphate that existed from the time of Mohammed until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1924. The Middle East was designated for phase one. They are fighting to regain complete and utter control over every aspect of life, and they will stop at nothing to achieve their goals, to include the use of weapons of mass destruction. To them, that is part of the price they must pay to achieve power on earth.

So who are these insurgents? The leadership comes from alienated, educated, moneyed elites, but their foot soldiers are drawn from the most troubled areas of the world. How do the dedicated leaders of this global insurgency generate recruits and resources? They have been preparing the battlefield for years. They have been operating in troubled areas of the world where the writ of liberal, representative government, or even effective autocratic or authoritative government, does not function. In failed or failing states, or failed parts of states, they have been the providers of education, medical care, and jobs. Through their education efforts, and their care for the population, they have been able to psychologically condition the people. *By providing what local governments have not, these insurgents have gained legitimacy, psychologically conditioned these populations, and created an area from which they can safely operate.*

Male children raised in cultures of violence are more likely to become delinquents or violent criminals. With indoctrination, these tendencies are valuable to the extremist. These troubled children are recruited from

² Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders, World Islamic Front Statement, 23 February 1998. <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>

extremist religious seminaries where they are indoctrinated from an early age about the spiritual importance of donating their lives in a holy war. The insurgents also capitalize on dire economic situations. Hopelessness, deprivation, envy, and humiliation make death and the reward of paradise appealing. They preached that “every good Muslim understands that it’s better to die fighting than to live without hope.”

The last time we fought so many people willing to die for their beliefs, who were thoroughly indoctrinated, it was called the Great Pacific War. Remember how tough that was. The habits of western military thought that value defeat over destruction, artful maneuver over slaughter, have a difficult time with an enemy that actively seeks death if it means killing us.

Once vulnerable individuals become part of these well-armed groups, they feel strong and powerful, perhaps for the first time in their lives. They are taught that their mission is holy, which destroys any moral ambiguities they might have. They are also taught that the United States is the epitome of what is wrong with the world. Globalization is another form of the colonial system; it is America’s attempt to dominate the rest of the world economically, culturally, and spiritually. The spread of consumer culture is seen as an assault on their dominant position in their society.

Jessica Stern, a Harvard professor, did a four-year study on terrorist organizations, living with them on occasion. Here are some of her conclusions:

- One of the biggest recruiting factors is the gap between the rich and the poor. They promise schooling, free membership in a sports club, transportation, scholarships, money and jobs for families. They are providing what the government has not.
- The failures of modern society also make these organizations very attractive to many Muslim families. These failures are like a disease and people everywhere begin to feel that the only way to protect their families is to go back to tradition, to religion. Families send their children to mosque, and there wait the recruiters.

- They recruit in the schools and sports clubs by promising the opportunity to not only kill infidels, but to provide economically for their families.
- They encourage suicide bombers in training to focus on the *ummah*, the Muslim community, not the demands of the “corrupt” Muslim rulers or the emotional loss their families will suffer. They promise these suicide bombers that their families will be taken care of. They win the hearts and minds of not only the suicide bombers, but their families as well.³

Let us understand the typical suicide bomber. He is young, often a teenager, and mentally immature. He is the second or third son, with no chance of inheriting anything from his family. There is intense pressure on him to find a job, which he can't. He can't work because he doesn't have any inside connections. He has no girlfriend or fiancée, and no money to pick up girls, even if that were possible. Marriage is not an option because of its expense—and without work, he can't support himself, much less a family. In short, life has no pleasure for him, only pain. He feels like he's lost everything.

Where does he go to deal with this problem? He goes to the local mosque. This is very different from here in the United States, where most people go to church on Sundays. At the mosque, prayer services are held five times daily, even at 4:00 AM, a service that all but the most devout usually skip. He begins attending every service. It is there that he comes to the attention of those watching, who see his anxiety, his worry, his depression. They talk to him, getting to know him and his situation—and his recruitment begins.

They talk to him of the paradise that awaits him if he should die in the jihad. They tell him that if he should volunteer for a suicide bombing, his family name will be held in the highest respect, and that he will be remembered as a *shaheed*, a martyr. They promise him that his family will receive money, food, clothing, things he has not been able to provide for them. But this all comes with a catch—he cannot tell anyone what he is doing. To ensure that

³ Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*, Ecco, New York, 2003, Ch.10.

he does not change his mind or tell anyone, they take him away from his home for the last 48 hours before the operation. During this time, he will write his will and his last letters, making it difficult if not impossible to turn back.

What is noteworthy about the situation is that almost no one commits a suicide bombing as an individual—it is always done as an organization, and candidates are trained. Logistics and planning are provided for the recruit, who becomes a *living martyr*. After all this, the recruit sees his death as being more valuable than his life, both for his country and himself.

How do we fight them?

How does the United States fight this network of global insurgency? How do we ensure that our success in the field is matched at the strategic level? We can begin by realizing some hard facts, and making a clear-eyed examination of our past successes and failures with insurgencies, and rigorously understanding what remains the same, and what has changed. One fact is that insurgencies have existed in many parts of the world for a long time. Indeed, many insurgencies that are now linked in some fashion to Al Qaeda or Jemaah Islamiah existed long before, due to valid, long-standing grievances. The various separatist movements in the southern Philippines are an example as are the Chechen and Uighur separatist movements. The linkages and mutual support among insurgencies from Algeria, to the Middle East, to Iraq, Afghanistan and Central Asia, and into Southeast Asia, are new. Ending all insurgencies is not a practical goal, however, a focused effort that addresses the underpinnings of terrorism can significantly reduce the threat. The requirements for a successful counter-insurgency, tightly integrated plans and actions across the wide range of governmental and societal functions, remains the same.

The United States is a nation that loves statistics. During Vietnam, we developed systems analysis, under Secretary of Defense McNamara's Whiz Kids, into high science. But we had it wrong in many ways because our traditional systems analysis could not measure a complex human enterprise. Our enemy did not react according to our western military and statistical

models. We did not understand the enterprise upon which we embarked, to paraphrase Clausewitz. We need a new tool to model and understand this new global phenomenon.

Complexity theory, on the other hand, argues that the dangerous aspect of this global insurgency is its enabling linkages.⁴ If so, complexity theory offers a path to a new line of strategy and attack. *Attacking the linkages offers a way to gain support from many nations and international organizations that are reluctant to join our current campaign.* Under this model, it is not necessary to kill every insurgent and separatist from Algeria to Papua New Guinea to the Philippines to Chechnya to Central Asia and western China. We cannot hope to defeat all the local insurgencies, but we must break the links that allow them to network. We must make local insurgencies a local issue again.

Ideology is one such a link. This war is a war of ideas, fought on a cultural frontier. We need to provide people with a better vision, with better hopes and chances than the insurgents do. We need to give people a way to earn a living so they are not vulnerable to ideologists. *Winning the hearts and minds of local populations is far more important than killing or capturing people.* We had a small campaign against the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASF) on Basilan Island in the Philippines. A major part of it was repairing roads. With the roads, the civilians had a way to get their crops to market without paying usurious taxes to the ASF. They turned away from them; the ASF leadership made a run for it and was apprehended at sea. There is now a prosperous Jollibee's, a more successful fast food franchise than McDonald's, on Basilan.

Finances and other resources are another such link. We must develop ways to track the movement of financial instruments, people, and materiel in a way that breaks the links, yet provides an appropriate degree of privacy and national sovereignty. All the links should be analyzed and interdicted in similar ways.

⁴ Larry Blakeley, "Observing Al Qaeda Through the Lens of Complexity Theory," Available from <www.royblakeley.name/larry_blakeley/articles/monthly_articles/Michael_beech200407.htm> Internet accessed September 1, 2005

What does the military need to do?

We must continue and even accelerate our adaptation to the tactics of these fundamentalist extremist insurgents. Our military heritage prizes overwhelming force over subtlety, Jomini over Sun Tzu. We feel that operations, strategy, logistics and technology are war's dimensions. Our military history since the Civil War and our concentration on global conventional war shape our attitudes. Remember how fast we dropped the study of insurgency after 1973, as we returned back to "real" war? We must get back to this form of warfare not just as it was in those days, but as it is now. We must also look at the experience of our friends and partner nations. In recent years, Australia completed one very successful counterinsurgency in the Solomon Islands, and is now embarked on a similar, but different, effort in Papua New Guinea. Their use of a federalized police force alone is worth serious national study.⁵

Any successful military strategy and doctrinal effort must acknowledge fundamental future trends. The developing world is becoming more lethal with the proliferation of nuclear weapons, chemical arms, long-range missiles and other highly capable weapons. Threats to the United States will be unpredictable and situation-dependent. There is no precise model to optimize force structure, so our forces will have to be multi-mission, mobile, flexible and capable of precise and discriminate use of military force. We must place a premium on the training and maturity of the young men and women who wear our nation's military uniform.

The most important future trend is that a permanent, large U.S. armed forces presence in these troubled areas is obsolete. Third party nationals based ashore, particularly wealthy Americans, provide a convenient target, both physically and as symbols for enemy strategic communication. More importantly, the American forces based ashore invariably have an adverse cultural impact that is self defeating. Our presence skews the local economy and provides flashpoints for violence. The local government, its forces and economy lose viability and credibility. The natural resentment of the local

⁵ Government of Australia, Department of Defence Annual Report 2003-2004, pg. 84, references to "Operation Anode"

population defeats us. Joint sea-basing, national capability afloat combined with expeditionary presence ashore, is one way to effective influence and worldwide mobility, without extensive infrastructure. We need to look seriously at this option for areas traditionally and culturally unable to accommodate a large permanent U.S. or other western presence.

The local, duly constituted government must do more for the people than the opposition or the United States. The minute the U.S. takes the lead, it begins to lose. Through flexible sea-basing and tailoring of our forces, we can enhance the local government's successes and at the same time avoid making ourselves attractive, vulnerable targets. Further, we can instantaneously control our level of intervention based on the local government's degree of acceptable behavior. By doing so, we help the local government fight its own corrupted elements and set the stage for defeat of the insurgency.

Ultimately, the goal is to gain decisive results with the least application of force and the consequent minimum loss of life. The end aim is the social, economic and political development of people subsequent to the defeat of the enemy insurgent. In these "small wars," respect, tolerance, sympathy and kindness should be the keynotes of our relationship with the mass of the population. We must provide military force, not as a broadsword, but as a scalpel. The solution lies in redefining the problem and our reaction to it.

The truly magnificent performance of our forces in the field has provided us the foundation. We need to take the lead as our government develops the strategy and the operational art for this new, global, long war. Attacking the linkages that bind terrorist organizations and winning the hearts and minds of the people whose countries are at risk, will bring the enhanced support of partner nations and success in the struggle. Those serving today deserve no less.

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