

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**CENTER OF GRAVITY AND THE WAR ON TERRORISM**

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## ABSTRACT

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“Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril.”

—Sun Tzu

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 were the most significant outrages committed as an expression of Islamist terrorism. They followed a litany of attacks against Americans and American institutions beginning in 1979 with the takeover of the American Embassy in Teheran, Iran. In the aftermath of the September attack, the United States launched its War on Terrorism. Unlike wars of the past in which the military element played a predominant part in bringing conflict to successful resolution, the War on Terrorism is different. More so than ever before due to the nature of the threat, the War on Terrorism requires the seamless integration of all the elements of national power (diplomatic/political, informational, military and economic (DIME)) to successfully counter the asymmetric threat represented by al-Qaeda. In order to accomplish this, two things must happen: First, we must understand the enemy and understand how our previous policies enabled these attacks. Second, in order to respond effectively, the al-Qaeda organization must be accurately analyzed to determine its center of gravity. All subsequent operations need to be focused on attacking this center of gravity.

This paper contends that al-Qaeda’s center of gravity is its radical Islamist ideology. Furthermore, it contends that the current definition of center of gravity contained in Joint doctrine has been misinterpreted from its original intent and thus inaccurately focuses efforts to deal with this new and unique threat. This has resulted in an operational approach that has been effective in the short term but, unless refocused, will not bring about a successful resolution in the War on Terrorism in the long term.

The paper begins with an overview of Islam and the Middle East, how Islam’s roots in the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula and subsequent internal challenges have influenced the Islamist ideology; Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, their history, organization, and the goal of

their ideology; and a review of the preexisting United States counterterrorism policy established in Presidential Decision Directive - 39 which, when combined with the litany of unanswered terrorist attacks over the past 23 years, enhanced radical belief in the Islamist ideology and is a significant contributory to the tragedy that befell this nation on September 11.

This is followed by an examination of the Clausewitzian concept of the center of gravity and subsequent interpretations used today. By selecting a non-doctrinal, but more relevant, interpretation of center of gravity an analysis is presented that determines Islamist ideology as al-Qaeda's center of gravity. The paper concludes with a review of the current policy for countering terrorism, the progress made in the War on Terrorism to see if current operations have accurately targeted the center of gravity, and provides recommendations and alternate approaches focused on attacking the center of gravity, its critical capabilities and threat.critical requirements in order to destroy the al-Qaeda network.

Administrative Note: There are many terms to describe Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda, and the radical ideology that they pursue. For the purpose of this paper I am using the following definition: an 'Islamist' is "One who seeks to make Islam a more prominent part of the political and social order, usually by implementing some version of Islamic law, or sharia. Often used as a more accurate replacement for the term "fundamentalist.""

(Definition obtained from PBS.org at

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/glossary/term/islamist.htm>)

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## THE CENTER OF GRAVITY AND THE WAR ON TERRORISM

### ISLAM, THE FUNDAMENTALISTS AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Any discussions about the Middle East would be incomplete if not put in context regarding the impact of Islam on the issue being discussed. Today, Islam is experiencing a clash within its civilization. Like previous clashes that have occurred since its inception in 622 CE, this clash, if not successfully resolved from the Western viewpoint, has the potential to become the clash *of* civilizations suggested by Samuel Huntington in his book The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order. It is not the focus of this paper to provide an in-depth tutorial of the religion itself. There are a number of excellent texts existing that accomplish this task far more proficiently than is possible here. What is important here is to understand the early chronology of the religion and how an evolving, progressive Islam has been challenged and, at times, hijacked for political purposes throughout its history. We are living through one of those times. This is not to imply that Islam's burden is unique. Nor is it the intent to imply the superiority of one religion to another. It is merely an attempt to demonstrate that the current ideological interpretation of the Quran and Islam by Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda has precedent in several fundamentalist movements over the past 1400 hundred years. Similar to today, when confronted with societal or political change, these movements sought to 'purify' the existing practice of Islam by returning to a stark, fundamentalist interpretation of the religion.

Towards the end of the sixth century the Quraysh, a Bedouin tribe, settled in the city of Mecca. Within generations they had become extremely wealthy as traders and merchants. A member of the tribe, Muhammad ibn Abdallah, became greatly concerned with the disparity of wealth among tribal members that was causing the loss of spirituality and the tribal ethic that had allowed the tribe to survive and prosper. In 610 CE, Muhammad sought his annual retreat at Mt Hira outside the city.<sup>1</sup> The resulting revelations over the next twenty three years were later recorded as the Holy Quran. By the time of his death in 632 CE, Muhammad was established as a prophet and the messenger of God. The Quran delivered a message of hope, established social mores, enforced the tribal ethic and provided Arabs their own intermediary with God. Islam was born as a religion.<sup>2</sup>

Since its inception there have been numerous retroactive movements that challenged an evolving Islam. Each has established a precedent found in today's Islamist ideology. These movements include those led by Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) and the Salafi movement, Ibn Abd-Al Wahhab (1703-1792) and the resultant Wahhabism, Hasan El Bana and the Muslim Brotherhood (1928-present), and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966).<sup>3</sup>

Quickly summarized, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century Ibn Taymiyya provided a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam confirming that revelation, not human intellect, was the only course of knowledge about God.<sup>4</sup> His equivocation of Jihad with the Five Pillars of Islam is the precedent on which much Islamist ideology is based on today.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, al-Wahhab, banished for preaching against influential Sufi doctrine, found refuge and united with a Bedouin chieftain, Ibn Sa'ud, forefather of today's Saudi Royal family. Wahhabism, based on the teachings of Taymiyya, taught that only Allah could be the object of worship. Any other acknowledgement, deference or veneration was considered blasphemy. Later, with the Sa'ud family ensconced as Arabia's rulers, the Wahhabis went on a rampage across the peninsula destroying gravesites and mosques adorned with minarets. Al-Wahhab redefined both Jews and Christians as 'polytheists' due to their veneration of prophets and Saints and, therefore, were to be considered infidels. Contrary to Mohammad's original intention expressed in the Quran, this new interpretation allowed for the killing of the non-Muslim 'children of the Book.' In Wahhabism, hate became a requirement and jihad obligatory.<sup>5</sup> Later, this was expanded as, "The goal of jihad today ought not to be to coerce people to accept Islam, because the Koran clearly encourages freedom of worship (Koran 2:256); rather it ought to be to over-throw non-Islamic regimes that corrupt their societies and divert people from service to God."<sup>6</sup>

The Muslim Brotherhood was established in the 1920s to contest the spread of secular, western influence and resist the British occupation of Egypt. Extremely popular, it became an international movement by the late 1940s. Its tendency towards excessive, at times unchanneled, violence forced Egyptian authorities ultimately to crush much of the movement. Due to its popularity and the nature of its grass roots organization, the Brotherhood continues to exist in several countries to this day.

Sayyid Qutb was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Educated in part in America, Qutb was repelled by U.S. support for Israel, its open society, and the separation of church and state. Qutb's book, Signposts Along The Way,<sup>7</sup> written while in prison continues to be a fundamentalist staple. His 'contribution' to jihad was an intellectual reasoning that sanctioned the overthrow and killing of fellow Muslims not considered sufficiently devout. In particular it focused on the rulers deemed corrupt or those following a secular path.

There are two important points to note here. The original Arab population evolved from nomadic, Bedouin tribes. Survival in the harsh, unforgiving desert environment required that tribal welfare supercede the concerns of any one individual. This applied to relations among tribes where the welfare of 'your' tribe came before any other tribe. It also gave rise to a strong

tradition of authoritarianism required for tribal leadership. All tribal members were dependent on each other with all having responsibilities for the old, the poor, and the infirm. This ethic was required for survival from time immemorial. It was codified in the Quran and remains an underlying theme found throughout the Arab culture to this day. It is important to acknowledge that unilateral individual submission to benefit the tribe/group directly contrasts with the values cherished by democracies in general and the United States in specific. Western civilization champions freedom, the rights of the individual, and freedom of choice based on individual desires/beliefs.

Second, for Islamists there is no separation of church and state. For them there is only Islam. Within Islam there may be many states or none. That Western nations exist as independent states with each nation containing many religions is inconceivable to Islamists. Borders are considered a Western innovation that will be irrelevant once Islamists have spread their ideology globally. Most of the existing borders that currently divide the Middle East are creations left from either the European colonial period or post World War I treaty delineations, periods that reflect the weakness of a Muslim world still declining.

The most significant country that represents these two themes is the United States, the leader of the western world. For Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, the United States stands for the exact opposite of everything that their version of Islam represents and thus sets the stage for an historic confrontation.

### **OSAMA BIN LADEN AND AL-QUEEDA**

“All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes, to make it possible.”<sup>6</sup>

—T.E. Lawrence

At 0848 on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001 a hijacked Boeing 767, American Airways Flight 11, slammed into Tower One of the World Trade Center. This was followed sixteen minutes later by a second hijacked Boeing 767, United Airlines Flight 175, slamming into Tower Two. Within the course of the next three hours two more aircraft, American Airways Flight 77 and United Airlines Flight 93 would impact the Pentagon and a farmer's field in western Pennsylvania, respectively. The subsequent collapse of both World Trade Center Towers One and Two left the indelible impression on the world that a new day had dawned. These events dramatically brought to the United States homeland what, until then, had been a remote war

fought by and against an asymmetric enemy. This enemy organization had not existed fifteen years previously and was led by a man grown to mythic proportions due to a number of factors including his exceptional wealth, social prestige, and courage demonstrated in combat against Soviet forces in Afghanistan. The organization is al-Qaeda. The man is Osama bin Laden.

### **FORMATIVE YEARS**

Much about Osama bin Muhammad bin Awad bin Laden's life, particularly the early portion, is unclear and remains in dispute. Different sources claim he was born alternately in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in 1955, another that he was born in Riyadh in 1957. He is the seventh son of more than fifty children sired by Sheik Mohammad bin Laden (deceased 1968), a native from the Sunni Chafeite Hadramout in South Yemen who immigrated to Saudi Arabia around 1930. His mother, the Sheik's fourth wife, was Syrian and reputed to be a woman ahead of her times. His siblings descended from a variety of different mothers of different nationalities leaving the family resembling an international consortium in and of itself.

Extremely wealthy by anyone's standards, the bin Laden family made its fortune in construction as the Bin Laden Group, initially in Saudi Arabia and later throughout the Middle East. The family has been extremely close to the Saudi Royal family since Mohammed bin Laden outbid other contractors to win contracts resulting in the construction of the Royal palaces. Later, he was rewarded with the contract to renovate Mecca. Subsequently, the family has been given a monopoly on any construction at all religious locations in Saudi Arabia. The family currently does business under the name 'Binladen Brothers for Contracting and Industry' headquartered in Jeddah.<sup>9</sup> Although exiled from Saudi Arabia and estranged from his family, Osama's personal fortune has been estimated to be in excess of \$300 million dollars.

Despite being raised by a domineering father who impressed a disciplined religious code on his children, there is nothing in bin Laden's early background to suggest that he would one day lead an organization committed to returning Saudi Arabia and the Muslim world to 17<sup>th</sup> century Wahhabism.

1979 is a critical turning point in bin Laden's life. That year, he received a degree from King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah.<sup>10</sup> It was at this university that bin Laden was exposed to radical Islam by professor Abdullah Azzam. However, it was external events occurring that year that profoundly changed him. In January, the Iranian Revolution occurred replacing a secular government with an Islamic Shia government. In March, Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel that was widely regarded as heresy throughout the Arab world. Later, in November during the annual Hajj to Mecca, Islamic fundamentalists forcibly seized and held the inner sanctum

(Kabbala). Extremely embarrassing to the Saudi Royal family, it was put down with a significant loss of life. But it was on 25 December, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan that his transformation to radical Islam began in earnest. In one of his earliest interviews bin Laden recalled, "When the invasion of Afghanistan started, I was enraged and went there at once. I arrived within days, before the end of 1979."<sup>11</sup>

### **AFGHANISTAN AND JIHAD**

In the early years of the Afghan conflict bin Laden traveled throughout the Middle East raising funds for the Jihad. Utilizing his social status and family financial and business connections he was able to establish relations with sympathetic individuals, Islamic organizations, and governments throughout the region, associations that would reward him with support in the future. Around 1982, he became more involved in the war effort by deploying plane loads of heavy equipment and personally leading the construction of roads, tunnels, defensive positions, training and logistics support areas. In 1984, bin Laden established a guest/clearing house for Jihadists in Peshawar that helped facilitate entry into the war zone. Simultaneously, he co-founded the Maktab al-Khidamat (MAK) or Services Office with Abdallah Azzam his former professor and mentor at King Abdul Aziz University and current member of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>12</sup> The renewed association with Azzam and greater exposure to his philosophy would further radicalize bin Laden. Eventually it would be Azzam who would conceptualize al-Qaeda.<sup>13</sup> MAK provided recruitment centers and public relations operations globally as well as financial, logistic and moral support to Mujahidin fighters inside Afghanistan. In 1986, bin Laden entered the fighting directly and led several combat operations against the Soviets although the number and intensity of the operations is contentious.<sup>14</sup> This was the same year he met and developed a deep and lasting relationship with Dr Ayman Muhammad Rabi' al-Zawahiri of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad.<sup>15</sup> Bin Laden developed a large and devoted following as is evidenced in the words of one of his fighters, "He not only gave us his money, but he also gave himself. He came down from his palace to live with the Afghan peasants and the Arab fighters. He cooked with them, ate with them, dug trenches with them. This is Bin Ladin's way."<sup>16</sup> Bin Laden's personal leadership allowed him to develop a devoted following of loyal Mujahidin that would form the core of his terrorist organization. In 1988, realizing that requirements existed to better organize and document the activities of the Mujahidin entering and exiting Afghanistan and to keep families of the wounded and dead informed as to their relatives' status, bin Laden set up al-Qaeda or 'the base'.<sup>17</sup> Later that year, bin Laden split with his mentor over Azzam's desire to have the Jihad remain solely focused on

anti-Soviet operations in Afghanistan. Bin Laden's goals were much larger as he envisioned "recreating the Caliphate, or uniting the whole Muslim world into a single entity"<sup>18</sup> and sought to expand the Jihad internationally. In 1989, he left Afghanistan, returning to Saudi Arabia a hero in the eyes of many of his people. Ironically, his own eyes were focused on Saddam Hussein who he perceived as the greatest threat to the Saudi kingdom.<sup>19</sup>

The Afghan experience left three key impressions on bin Laden. First, the case for Jihad was established as this war was fought between the 'infidel' Soviets and an Islamic state. The conflict allowed him to focus on external enemies of Islam rather than on internal oppressors.<sup>20</sup> Second, he gained a greater appreciation for and the ability to conduct the operational planning, logistic and support functions required to fight a superpower. Finally, in stating, "The myth of the super power was destroyed not only in my mind but also in the minds of all Muslims", he now understood that a superpower could be defeated.<sup>21</sup> Bin Laden and his fellow Mujahidin not only attributed the defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan to divine support of their Islamist ideology, but also the implosion of the entire Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This only reinforced his faith in the righteousness of his cause and his beliefs. While bin Laden may not have arrived in Afghanistan a true believer, he clearly left as one.

The next turning point in his life occurred within a year when the Saudi Royal family denied his offer to raise an army of Afghan (Muslim) war veterans to defend the kingdom against Iraq. This is likely due to the fear that bin Laden would muster insufficient and/or ineffective forces to oppose the Iraqis and of having too many Islamists in the kingdom after the conflict. Instead, they requested that the United States deploy forces to defend the Kingdom from Saddam Hussein. The decision to allow armed 'infidels' into Saudi Arabia enraged bin Laden. When the Royal family reneged on their promise to have Western forces withdraw after the Gulf War, bin Laden began his campaign against the monarchy. In his eyes, the Royal Family had forsaken any legitimacy as an Islamic government with this decision and the increasingly secular nature of their policies. In 1991, under pressure in Saudi Arabia, bin Laden brought his organization and best fighters to Sudan. While there he established numerous legitimate businesses, some later serving as fronts for al-Qaeda operations. In 1994, he was stripped of his citizenship by the Saudi government for engaging in subversive Islamist activity. Two years later, in 1996, he was expelled from Sudan due to diplomatic pressure brought by the United States, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia for al-Qaeda's part in the 1995 assassination attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. As a result, bin Laden and al-Qaeda found sanctuary in Afghanistan provided by the Taliban while the intelligence communities of the world lost much of their ability to monitor al-Qaeda activities.

## AL-QAEDA

Al-Qaeda is the first transnational terrorist organization networked with autonomous groups and cells in more than 60 different countries. It plans, coordinates, funds, and directs terrorist activities worldwide. It is unique among any known terrorist groups, prizing secrecy and initially disclaiming any operational involvement or success. Al-Qaeda operatives have conquered the fear of death preferring to depart this world for the promises of the afterlife. Violence underscores its method of changing the political landscape evident in its position that, “Islamic governments have never been and will never be, established through peaceful solutions and cooperative councils. They are established as they [always] have been by pen and gun by word and bullet by tongue and teeth.”<sup>22</sup> The major difference between al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations is its global reach, capability, and willingness to inflict mass casualties.<sup>23</sup>

Al-Qaeda's key leadership follows the fundamentalist Salafi version of Islam. Salafis, associated with the puritanical Wahhabis, “view Islam in its totality, addressing all humanity irrespective of culture, race or colour. It is this aspect that enabled Osama to reach beyond the Sunnis....”<sup>24</sup> Despite their Sunni persuasion they are not inhibited from working with Shiite groups when their interests coincide. Bin Laden has reportedly had meetings with Imud Mugniyeh of Hezbollah who was responsible for the bombings of the American Embassy and the Marine Barracks in Beirut and ultimately credited with driving the United States out of Lebanon.<sup>25</sup> Among al-Qaeda's more significant members are the Islamic Jihad (Egypt), the Jamaat Islamiyya (Egypt), the Islamic Army of Aden (Yemen), the Armed Islamic Group (Algeria), the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (Algeria), the Jemaah Islamiyah (SE Asia) and the Abu Sayyaf Group (Malaysia and the Philippines).

Bin Laden and al-Qaeda's ultimate goal is “to unite all Muslims and establish a government which follows the rule of the Caliphs.”<sup>26</sup> Specifically, they want to establish the rule of God on earth, remove existing Muslim governments (purify the ranks of Islam from the elements of depravity), and drive Western influence from the Middle East.<sup>27</sup> They will do this by focusing their efforts on the United States and its interests which, to date, have been easier to target than regional Middle Eastern governments due to their internal security apparatus. Their strategic goals are to:

- Drive the U.S. out of Saudi Arabia and, eventually, out of the Middle East.
- Effect a regime change within Saudi Arabia replacing the Royal Family with a fundamentalist Muslim version governed only by the Sharia.

- Establish a Palestinian state.
- Eliminate the State of Israel.

In 1996, al-Qaeda declared war on the United States when bin Laden published his first *fatwa*, “Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places.” This was a list of grievances pertaining to western actions against Muslims and Islam and the lack of leadership of the ruling family. In 1998, he announced the creation of a new terrorist alliance when he issued the “Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders”. This organization was new in name only, but the technique was classic al-Qaeda in keeping with their desire for secrecy. The declaration specified three particular grievances: (1) the illegitimacy of stationing of American forces on Saudi soil, (2) the continued blockade and sanctions levied by the United Nations against Iraq, and (3) unilateral support for Israel. His instructions to his followers were chilling:

“The duty 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 and the holy mosque (Mecca) from their grip, and in order for their armies to move off of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty God.”<sup>28</sup>

In Western opinion, al-Qaeda’s fundamentalist interpretation of Islam and their movement is hijacking the religion. This is not without precedent. However, without a viable alternative, an alternative that can take Islam into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and allow it to incorporate modernity, many Muslims will rally to bin Laden and al-Qaeda’s message instead of living with the status quo.

#### **PRE 9/11 UNITED STATES COUNTERTERRORISM POLICY**

“It is the policy of the United States to deter, defeat, and respond vigorously to all terrorist attacks on our territory and against our citizens, or facilities, whether they occur domestically, in international waters or airspace or on foreign territory.”

—Presidential Decision Directive - 39

The Clinton Administration issued Presidential Decision Directive - 39, US Policy on Counterterrorism (PDD - 39) on June 21, 1995.<sup>29</sup> From it, the following principles came to form the basis of US Counterterrorism policy:

First, make no concessions to terrorists and strike no deals;

Second, bring terrorists to justice for their crimes;

Third, isolate and apply pressure on states that sponsor terrorism to force them to change their behavior; and

Fourth, bolster the counterterrorism capabilities of those countries that work with the U.S. and require assistance.<sup>30</sup>

When PDD - 39 was issued, politically, not religiously, motivated behavior was the common denominator that defined terrorism.<sup>31</sup> The emergence of non-state actors or the conduct of terrorist acts solely for financial profit or religiously motivated goals was not seriously considered.<sup>32</sup> The concept of a non-state actor with global aspirations remained in fictional books and movies. Until the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center, virtually all terrorist incidents against Americans targeted interests and/or citizens outside of the continental U.S. In keeping with generally accepted analyses of the terrorist threat, PDD - 39 was reactive, primarily focused on alleged deterrence by promising apprehension and prosecution for those engaged in terrorist activities.

There were four issues that converged over time that, individually, may have been insignificant. Combined, they shaped the battlefield to allow al-Qaeda to plan and execute its attacks successfully.

The first issue arose with the publication of PDD - 39 which directed the Department of State to assume lead agency responsibility for international terrorism and the Department of Justice to assume lead agency responsibility for domestic terrorism.<sup>33</sup> This unintentionally created a bureaucratic 'seam' by dividing agency responsibilities along geographic boundaries. This divide was so great that it was not possible for these agencies to come to a common definition of terrorism.<sup>34</sup> The result was an operational focus in different directions with no integrating nexus. Additionally, it did not establish the responsibility for information fusion and distribution of all source intelligence. Instead of directing a holistic approach to countering terrorism universally, it reinforced the bureaucratic tendency of each agency to focus exclusively on its own territory, which resulted in a lack of informational and operational interface. Terrorists easily exploited this seam such as on September 11th.

The second issue was the policy of the Clinton Administration to view terrorism as a criminal problem. This policy focus of judicial pursuit underscored PDD-39 and permeated all aspects of the United States Government policy to countering terrorism during his administration. As a result, his administration sought to resolve terrorist incidents by using the traditional crime solving methodology of investigation, apprehension, and prosecution. Where terrorists successfully conducted attacks (ex. World Trade Center in 1993, East Africa Embassy

bombings in 1998), United States agencies, primarily Department of Justice, with international cooperation investigated, apprehended, and successfully prosecuted numerous individuals. A peripheral result was that it, de facto, acceded primacy in countering terrorism to the Federal Bureau of Investigation even though the Department of State was designated 'lead agency' for terrorist incidents occurring outside the continental United States. As evinced after the East Africa Embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam and, later, after the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen, FBI legations were left behind as permanent elements at each embassy. This global spread of America's premier investigative organization enabled the Clinton Administration to pursue judicial resolution to a rapidly growing threat that was misunderstood by all but a few. This approach was politically feasible, allowing the administration to take credit for the few success stories while allowing them to avoid the hard decisions that would have significantly impacted on al-Qaeda's operational planning.

The third issue was the unique challenge presented by bin Laden and al-Qaeda. The United States was faced with "how to respond to an enemy who is a man and not a state; who has no structured organization, no headquarters, and no fixed address; and whose followers live in different countries and feel a loyalty not so much to that man as to the ideology of militant Islam?"<sup>35</sup> The United States was unwilling to comprehend and believe the bluntly stated objectives being published by bin Laden. The American political environment, having been conditioned by decades of political rhetoric, was not used to the unambiguous nature of the bin Laden *fatwas*. Since al-Qaeda did not fit the mold of any previously known terrorist organizations, it was hard to take seriously the claims of the self-proclaimed cleric. According to several intelligence officials, the Clinton administration's answer, to a large extent, was to do precisely what UBL had been doing for years: it mythologized him.<sup>36</sup> This was further reinforced with his escape from harm after missile attacks resulting from the East Africa Embassy bombings. Unfortunately, because of insufficient understanding of the nature, organization, or depth of the developing terrorist threat, little was done to effectively counter the growing problem.<sup>37</sup> Counterterrorism's primary focus remained on "the use of AK-47s and vehicular borne explosive attacks".<sup>38</sup> Not until the 1993 World Trade Center bombing did the nature of the new threat to the U.S. become apparent. It became manifest in the attacks of 9/11.

The fourth issue that made 9/11 possible was the failure of the U.S. Government, over several Administrations, to correctly diagnose the center of gravity and formulate proactive, convincing responses to acts of terrorism against Americans and American interests. This failure extended from the time of the American Embassy takeover in 1979 through the attack on the U.S.S. Cole and includes:

- The takeover of the American Embassy, Teheran, Iran, 1979
- The bombing of the American Embassy, Beirut, Lebanon, 1983
- The bombing of the Marine Barracks, Beirut, Lebanon, 1983
- The dozens of hijackings and hostage takings throughout the 1980s
- The withdrawal of American forces from Somalia after the battle of Mogadishu, 1993
- The World Trade Center bombing, New York City, 1993
- The bombing of the Saudi Military Installation, Riyadh, 1995
- The bombing of Khobar Towers, Dhahran, 1996
- The East Africa Embassy bombings, 1998
- The bombing of the U.S.S. Cole, Aden, Yemen, 2000

A classic example of this failure and the resulting effect is the Clinton administration's decision to launch Operation Infinite Reach against al-Qaeda in retaliation for the East Africa bombings. Having received actionable intelligence, the President decided on the 'high-tech' solution by targeting a meeting of al-Qaeda leaders with cruise missiles instead of committing American forces and "putting boots on the ground", a decision that would have sent a culturally attuned message fully understood throughout the Arab world. Failure to capture or kill bin Laden and al-Qaeda leaders by ground forces would have been regarded by the Arab world as 'Inshallah - the will of Allah', but the unspoken message that the United States was unafraid to put its people at risk to achieve its strategic goals would have resonated throughout the region. Domestically, an American ground operation was a tremendous political liability. Anything less than success without casualties was a risk that could not have been reconciled in an administration that sought "Engagement and Enlargement" and pursued international terrorists as common criminals.

Understanding the previous policy on countering terrorism is critical in determining how to counter and eliminate this threat in the future. Analysis of the threat failed to consider the disconnection of what happens when your enemy has unlimited objectives and your objectives are limited. Given the Clinton administration's interpretation of the threat and judicial approach to resolution, there is no indication that this question was considered and a formal center of

gravity analysis conducted. If one had been undertaken one could only guess if it would have revealed the global network that al-Qaeda had developed and the realistic threat it posed to the United States. Having failed to 'connect the dots' and conduct such an analysis, the strategic appraisal of 'Ends' never materialized, let alone 'Ways' and 'Means'.

Convinced that he was empowered by Allah and emboldened by al-Qaeda successes in Mogadishu, Saudi Arabia, New York City, East Africa, and in Aden, bin Laden confirmed for his followers that the United States was the 'paper tiger' that he had always claimed. The weak or non-existent responses of the Clinton administration led al-Qaeda to believe that all things were possible; that whatever outrages they conceived of could be perpetrated without any significant consequence. Failure to appropriately respond to some, if not all, of these incidents shaped the battlefield in such a way as to make the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> inevitable.

### CENTER OF GRAVITY THEORY

What the theorist has to say here is this: one must keep the dominant characteristic of both belligerents in mind. Out of these characteristics a certain center of gravity develops, the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies should be directed... If the enemy is thrown off balance, he must not be given time to recover. Blow after blow must be aimed in the same direction: the victor, in other words, must strike with all his strength and not just against a fraction of the enemy's. [Only] ... by constantly seeking out the center of his power, by daring all to win all, will one really defeat the enemy.<sup>39</sup>

—Clausewitz, *On War*

Center of Gravity theory originates from Carl von Clausewitz', *On War*, the critical passage cited above. Correctly determining the center of gravity has become a staple in Joint warfare over the last several decades since Clausewitz' theories have resurfaced in prominence at American military professional education institutions. That "war is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means,"<sup>40</sup> requires correctly determining the center of gravity to allow the effective and efficient application of military power and, in modern times, the power of the other elements of national power to achieve the political result sought. Generally, for the military, the center of gravity has been the point at which overwhelming force is applied to break the will of the enemy to resist.<sup>41</sup> Clausewitz stressed "the task of reducing the sources of enemy strength to a *single* center of gravity."<sup>42</sup> Despite the usefulness of and rigor attached to correctly determining the center of gravity, there are limitations in reading too much into Clausewitz' theories. It must be remembered that Clausewitz wrote in the context of

his times (1800s) with a focus on established states, the militaries they sponsored, and the things that enabled them such as alliances and larger nation sponsors. Clausewitz viewed the center of gravity in terms of applying military power primarily against other militaries. The proportionate utilization and integration of the other elements of national power did not materialize. Similarly today, much of the problem with center of gravity analysis is that it is usually performed by the military using military methodology with a focus on military objectives. This tends to focus planners on the operational at the risk of forgetting to focus on the real strategic center of gravity objective in the national political sense.

As On War gained a wider audience, a myriad of other books were published that sought to interpret and/or further develop the center of gravity theory. In 1986, Army FM 100-5 contained a full page discussion on center of gravity and declared that “the center of gravity of an armed force refers to those sources of strength or balance.”<sup>43</sup> It also stated that centers of gravity existed at all levels (strategic, operational, and tactical) of war. In 1989, the Marine Corps published MCDP-1 Warfighting containing an interpretation of center of gravity which equated it to a critical vulnerability or source of weakness.<sup>44</sup> Both of these interpretations diverge from a traditional, more fundamental interpretation of Clausewitz. Differing definitions present a problem in Joint warfighting where precise words need to be used precisely with the common definition acknowledged by all.

In 1996, Dr. Joe Strange of the Marine Corps University published Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities in an attempt to provide a more integrated understanding of the concept between the existing service and Joint definitions. In it, he provides simple definitions of center of gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities (CV) and introduces the concepts of Critical Capabilities (CC), and Critical Requirements (CR).<sup>45</sup> These concepts are useful tools when distinguishing between the true center of gravity and important abilities, conditions, resources and/or means that contribute to the center of gravity. They were subsequently included in current joint doctrinal publications.

Currently, Joint Publication 5-00.1, 25 January 2002, states that the center of gravity is “Those characteristics, capabilities, or sources of power from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight.” It freely condones the concept of multiple centers of gravity at all levels of conflict.

In September 2002, LTC A. Echevarria II, USA published another analysis of Clausewitz’s intent, in which he takes issue with several commonly held interpretations. Essentially returning to a narrower view of Clausewitz’ intent, he criticizes both the service and Joint definitions of center of gravity as being too broad based and consensus derived to be effective.

Subsequently, he argues that, given the timeframe in which On War was written, Clausewitz' original concept of center of gravity is analogous to that found in physics and the natural sciences; that center of gravity is a matter of balance and not a source of either strength or weakness.<sup>46</sup> The center of gravity is a focal point, found only where sufficient connectivity exists among parts of the enemy to form an overarching system. The center of gravity possesses a *centripetal force* that holds the system/structure together and requires viewing the enemy holistically, as a system.<sup>47</sup> The German translation of On War articulates this clearly:

“What theory can admit to thus far is the following: Everything depends upon keeping the dominant characteristics of both states in mind. From these emerge a certain center of gravity, a *focal point (Zentrum)* of force and movement, upon which the larger whole depends; and, *it is against the enemy's center of gravity that the collective blow of all power must be directed.*”<sup>48</sup>

Thus, the critical blow must be directed against the center of gravity, to *unhinge* the system causing its destruction. Additionally, Echevarria argues for a single center of gravity taking issue with the concept of multiple centers of gravity normally with one being identified at each level of war. Clausewitz clearly states, “The center of gravity is defined by the entire system (or structure) of the enemy, not by a level of war” although he does allow for the possibility of more than one center of gravity when geographic factors separate an opposing force.<sup>49</sup>

In order to provide a useful analytical tool for operational planners, the CJCS and the services have sought, in their own ways, to refine and structure center of gravity analysis into a quantifiable science, applicable in all cases, at all levels of conflict. This rigid approach may work well when facing known conventional military threats. However, AQ is a different and unique enemy and presents a different and unique threat. The decentralized, amorphous nature of its structure does not lend itself to a military attack. The ability of its nodes to independently plan and execute operations requires that its center of gravity analysis must be more of an art, requiring creativity both in the analysis and in the determination produced. The process must include the participation of a variety of analysts with an unconventional mindset. This analysis must objectively consider the implications to and contributions of all of the elements of national power, not just the military, and incorporate them into the solution.

## ANALYSIS OF AL-QAEDA'S CENTER OF GRAVITY

Correctly identifying al-Qaeda's center of gravity is the key to victory. In order to do this, the first requirement is to establish the criteria that will be used to compare the different candidates. The following three criteria from LTC Echevarria have the most useful application:

Determine whether identifying and attacking a center of gravity is appropriate for the type of war we are going to wage.

Determine whether the adversary's whole structure or system is sufficiently connected to be treated as a single body.

Determine what element has the necessary centripetal force to hold the system together.<sup>50</sup>

These criteria will be utilized for the following reasons: First, given the unique, asymmetric nature of the threat, it is unlikely that a specific strength (critical capability or critical requirement) or weakness (critical vulnerability) exists that lends itself to purely military solution. Al-Qaeda was established specifically as a non-state actor, which facilitates its deniability, operational flexibility and enhances organizational survival. The global dimension and complexity of this threat requires the application of an integrated diplomatic, informational, military, and economic (DIME) response. Second, the analysis should attempt to remain true to the original concept of one center of gravity. Why? Center of gravity analysis is only a tool. The concept is wonderful but the tool must be useful. There are no prizes awarded at the end of a conflict to the planner that came closest to utilizing Clausewitz's original intent. Allowing for only one center of gravity will require planners to consider the threat holistically, intensify their focus, and force them to apply a greater degree of rigor to their analysis. The resulting determination will establish and focus the unity of effort ultimately allowing the United States to attack al-Qaeda's center of gravity. Those candidates found not to be the center of gravity will be classified using Dr. Joe Strange's 'CG-CV-CC-CR' (Center of Gravity, Critical Vulnerability, Critical Capability, Critical Requirement) approach to determine their relationship to the center of gravity.

Using the stated criteria, the War on Terrorism against al-Qaeda clearly satisfies the first requirement. Despite fighting an asymmetric enemy, a different fight than normally envisioned, the War on Terrorism should be considered total war. The end state cannot allow al-Qaeda to function or exist as an entity in any form.

Al-Qaeda is a diverse, highly decentralized organization consisting of numerous fundamentalist Muslim organizations and individuals. Possessing a worldwide presence in at least 76 countries<sup>51</sup> despite the lack of their own state or state sponsorship, they perform command, control, and communication functions, plan and execute terrorist operations, provide financing and logistic support, and recruit new members. The globally networked systems nature of al-Qaeda satisfies the second criteria.

With the first two criteria met, the third element becomes defining. There are several issues that some would claim as al-Qaeda's center of gravity. They include the unequivocal United States support to Israel, the Israeli/Palestinian crisis, United States military forces garrisoned in Saudi Arabia, UN sanctions imposed on Iraq, corrupt Arab regimes, and the generally repressive conditions that exist in the Muslim world, particularly in the Middle East. None of these issues meet the stated criteria for a center of gravity. While all of these are strategic issues for the Middle East and ultimately require resolution, they are overarching conditions, the cumulative roots of which provide the fertilizer of discontent in which the radical Islamist ideology flourishes. What is at issue is how and by whom will they be resolved. For al-Qaeda, these are critical capabilities supporting its agenda.

The following candidates are considered potential centers of gravity: (1) financial resources, (2) command, control and communications network, (3) global mobility, (4) sanctuary/safe haven, (5) Osama bin Laden and the core leadership of al-Qaeda, and (6) the radical Islamist ideology.

The financial support of any organization is critical to success. Al-Qaeda is financed from several sources including the personal wealth of bin Laden, legitimate business operations owned by bin Laden and al-Qaeda, donations by individuals, organizations and charities sympathetic to their cause, and criminal activities particularly drug trafficking. They maintain their substantial assets in cash denominated in numerous different currencies and numbered accounts in banking institutions globally. Several of the legitimate businesses provide funding and facilitate money laundering. Recently, there have been confirmed reports that al-Qaeda is moving considerable cash assets into diamonds and gold. The latter transcends the efforts of the U.S. to immobilize visible assets in commercial institutions. Previously, they have demonstrated the ability to move funds/assets through the global financial network unobserved. While their finances are not the center of gravity, they are a critical requirement for continued operations.

Al-Qaeda's global command, control and communications network integrates and utilizes both advanced information technology as well as primitive methods. Al-Qaeda is the ultimate

practitioner of the maneuver warfare concepts of commander's intent and mission orders. Their utilization of the Internet, cellular telephones, satellite communications, and commercial television has allowed al-Qaeda to command and control operations globally. They are equally adept at using couriers carrying messages or repeating them from memory and have demonstrated expertise at clandestine communications. Currently, in the post Taliban phase, al-Qaeda's use of cellular telephone and satellite communications have been severely curtailed due to intercepts. Virtually universal access to the Internet allows al-Qaeda to utilize it extensively in all aspects of its operations. While advocating a return to fundamentalism, al-Qaeda openly conducts fundraising activities, personnel recruiting, and propaganda activities via website postings. Operational signals and logistic support coordination are posted anonymously, normally encrypted in Koranic verse or with password protect technology. One of the most dependable and resilient methods of communications within the Muslim world is still the passage of information in the oral tradition euphemistically described as the 'Ethernet,' where messages are passed in the timeless verbal tradition of the desert; from mosque to believers, from tribal chief to tribal members, from fathers to sons across the world. Their communications network is a critical requirement but not a center of gravity.

Al-Qaeda's operational mobility and the openness of Western societies enable an unparalleled ease of movement globally. Not requiring the movement of large numbers of personnel similar to a conventional military force, al-Qaeda moves individuals and small groups via all forms of commercial transportation although the viability of transcontinental airline travel has recently decreased due to increased scrutiny. Alternate methods of transcontinental travel include passenger, cruise and container ship passage. This ease of mobility allows for the rapid assembly of its operators at training locations, at staging areas prior to and during operational execution, and facilitates dispersal after terrorist attacks. Their ability to establish 'sleeper' agents in future target locations, move operatives into designated countries, and sustain networks throughout the world negates the requirement to have state-like safe haven for all but a critical few. Al-Qaeda's mobility and freedom to travel is clearly a critical requirement but not a center of gravity.

Sanctuary/safe haven has been critical to al-Qaeda's growth as an organization and to its early operational successes. Sanctuary provides al-Qaeda a location and some type of 'top cover' for individuals and/or organizations to live, plan, and operate from with some degree of impunity. Depending on its location it may also provide future recruits to the Jihad. The disadvantage to a relatively permanent location is that it makes the job of collection and targeting agencies much easier. In the past decade sanctuary was found in Sudan, later

Afghanistan. Although both nations were essentially 'failed states' making them ideal for al-Qaeda, both found it advantageous to have bin Laden and al-Qaeda as 'residents' for the economic assistance they brought. Sanctuary is not limited to a state-like entity. It can come in the form of a government, a tribe, or a geographic area that provides the requirements listed above. Ideally it would present some type of obstacle (sovereignty, diplomatic immunity, physical challenge) that would inhibit or preclude ease of pursuit or invasion by opposing forces. In response to American military operations and the fall of Afghanistan, al-Qaeda has been forced to assume a more maneuverist posture that capitalizes on the benefits of globalization and information technology to reduce the requirement for permanent sanctuary. Future sanctuary is still available in portions of Central Asia (Uzbekistan), the Caucasus (Chechnya) or the Middle East (along the Afghani-Pakistan border, along the Yemeni-Saudi border) and in portions of Africa (Somalia, Kenya). Possible but unlikely would be a relocation to South East Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines) to find sanctuary. For the United States, philosophically 'draining the swamp' or eliminating safe havens attacks a critical requirement, but not the center of gravity.

Bin Laden and al-Qaeda's core leadership are linked operationally and spiritually, despite some attempts to distinguish between them. The central leadership cell is small and established in a highly compartmented manner. Led by Bin Laden and Dr. Ayman Muhammad al-Zawahiri it is the nerve center of the al-Qaeda organization described earlier. It has demonstrated the ability to unify numerous disparate groups, many with separate agendas, focus them, sequence their actions and unite them in a common ideological cause against a non-Muslim world. There is a significant reservoir of talent within the leadership cell such that it does not depend on bin Laden's existence to operate or survive. This is evidenced by the successful operations in Bali and in Mombasa, Kenya conducted by al-Qaeda despite the reported 'death' of bin Laden during the Battle of the Tora Bora, December 2001. Although it appears that bin Laden survived the massive bombings, al-Qaeda was nonetheless able to conduct operations such as these with bin Laden and perhaps its core leadership in a diminished state. While bin Laden may appear to be the centerpiece of the organization and has been instrumental in organizing, financing, and leading al-Qaeda, he is not the center of gravity. Neither his death nor that of the core leadership will eliminate al-Qaeda's global operations. It is appropriate to consider both of them as critical capabilities. Due to the operational nature of this cell, targeting it does present a legitimate opportunity for the direct application of military power.

The Jihadist ideology of al-Qaeda is the center of gravity. It provides the centripetal force required to hold the system together. No longer just an Arab philosophy pertaining to the Middle East, its universalistic appeal has enabled it to spread globally. The Western perspective that this movement is an attempt to gain power for purely political reasons discounts the reality that, for the Islamist, there is no difference between religion and politics. For the fundamentalist, they are one and the same with there being no conceptual validity to the separation between mosque and state. The critical capabilities and the critical requirements derived from this analysis reveal the tangible elements that make al-Qaeda as powerful and effective as it is today. The underlying belief that all operations are conducted in the name of and under the blessing of Allah links Islamist operations globally. This empowers the true believers worldwide, including many who hold important positions in governments, some in a 'sleeper' or 'fifth' column capacity. Several of these sleeper operatives have provided information to al-Qaeda, alerting them to future counter terrorism operations. Despite desert origin, it must be remembered that Arabs and Islam are not one and the same. Where the majority of Arabs are Muslim, there are billions of Muslims throughout the world of all races and ethnic backgrounds. It is this intangible adherence to the radical belief, somewhat akin to the 'will of the people' for Americans, that binds Islamists together worldwide. Given this analysis, there appears to be little opportunity to apply direct military power against al-Qaeda's center of gravity.

### **COUNTERING TERRORISM POST 9/11**

"We will direct every resource at our command -- every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war -- to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network."

—President George W. Bush  
September 20, 2001

"We wage war to save civilization, itself."

—President George W. Bush  
November 8, 2001

In responding to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the United States policy on countering terrorism has dramatically shifted from passive deterrence to proactive engagement. It has addressed the threat by applying all of the elements of national power in the DIME (diplomatic, information, military, economic) construct, although not all in equal proportion. The initial

application has been of the military element primarily focused on destroying al-Qaeda and removing the Taliban government in Afghanistan.

The Bush Administration's simple, direct approach took much of the world by surprise. Unlike the tepid, ineffective responses in the past the United States was responding in a clear, unambiguous manner resonating strength and purpose. This was eloquently stated a year and a half later in President Bush's West Point graduation speech:

“Some worry that it is somehow undiplomatic or impolite to speak the language of right and wrong. I disagree. Different circumstances require different methods, but not different moralities. Moral truth is the same in every culture, in every time, and in every place.”<sup>52</sup>

Within hours after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, the President addressed the nation, displaying a keen sense of leadership and sending the unspoken message that there was a proactive leader in charge. Within days he issued Proclamation 7463 of September 14, 2001 – Declaration of National Emergency by Reason of Certain Terrorist Attacks that authorized the activation of the Armed Forces Ready Reserve, many of whom were deployed to airports throughout the US helping to restore the shaken confidence of a nation. On September 20<sup>th</sup> he addressed the Congress and, in no uncertain terms, articulated the threat that was facing the US. Specifically, he named the enemy, al-Qaeda, no longer referring to an ambiguous ‘terrorist threat.’ He began to prepare the American people for a war unlike any they had ever experienced before. He put the American people on notice that this war would not be another Desert Storm; rather it would be a much longer war against an unseen enemy. The stakes would be much higher as the US was fighting not only for its way of life, but for freedom itself against an enemy bent on “imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere.”<sup>53</sup> The President's candid approach left no doubt in anyone's mind what course lay ahead.

Diplomatically, the President was able to rapidly fashion an international coalition clearly focused on detecting and eliminating terrorists wherever they existed. On September 12, the United Nations Security Council condemned the attacks and reiterated the inherent right of self-defense in accordance with the United Nations Charter.<sup>54</sup> Culminating on September 28 with the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373, all member nations were required to prevent terrorism, deny safe haven for terrorists, suppress financial support for the same, and increase intelligence sharing and law enforcement cooperation.

On September 23, he issued Executive Order 13224 – Blocking Property And Prohibiting Transactions With Persons Who Commit, Threaten To Commit, or Support Terrorism. This

economic measure gave the Treasury Department the executive authority to freeze bank accounts, block financial transactions and assets of individuals and organizations that were supporting designated terrorist organizations. In less than two months the Government was able to block the assets of sixty-two organizations and individuals linked to money transfer networks supporting terrorists. Additionally, it allowed the government to deny access to United States markets by those banks and institutions failing to cooperate in freezing terrorist assets.<sup>55</sup> The result was more than \$24 million in assets frozen by October 2001.<sup>56</sup>

Militarily, the President issued an ultimatum to the Taliban to relinquish custody of Osama bin Laden and the senior al-Qaeda leadership present in Afghanistan. When the Taliban did not comply, he launched Operation Enduring Freedom which ultimately liberated Afghanistan, denied safe haven to terrorists, destroyed the Taliban as an effective government and fighting force, and diminished the al-Qaeda leadership capability, killing several key leaders and putting the rest to flight. Later, American military forces deployed to the Philippines to begin training military forces in order to counter the growing al-Qaeda threat in Asia. These actions had a resounding psychological impact across the Middle East and across the Islamist world as it openly contradicted bin Laden's assertion that the U.S. would never commit its forces when there was a danger of casualties.

The most significant contributions to the War on Terrorism in terms of policy have been the publication of the National Security Strategy - 2002 (NSS) and the massive governmental reorganization outlined in the National Strategy for HOMELAND SECURITY recently approved by the United States Senate. The National Security Strategy, in particular, highlights the philosophical differences between the current and past administrations. Reaffirming in writing the President's previous statements, the National Security Strategy provides a bias for action. Devoting a chapter exclusively to the War on Terrorism, it describes the outline of the campaign against terrorism. Simply stated:

“The United States will make no concessions to terrorist demands and strike no deals with them. We make no distinction between terrorists and those who knowingly harbor or provided aid to them.”<sup>57</sup>

The United States would no longer seek to 'engage and enlarge'. Instead it will lead from the front preferably in consonance with its allies, but act unilaterally if there is no other choice. Ambiguous policies are no longer acceptable. Either you are with us or against us. Recognizing the inherent right of a nation to legally act in self-defense, it further asserts the right of the nation to act preemptively by stating:

“The United States has long maintained the option of preemptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security. The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction—and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy’s attack. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.”<sup>58</sup>

Realizing the sensitivity in the Middle East to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, it diplomatically commits the United States to supporting an independent Palestinian state and to ending the construction of Israeli settlement activities in the occupied territories.<sup>59</sup>

As a result of proactive leadership the War on Terrorism has achieved initial success, particularly on the military front. Several senior al-Qaeda leaders have been killed and others captured as a result of the increased international cooperation between intelligence agencies and law enforcement organizations. However, the war is far from over, which leads to the question: Was an enemy center of gravity analysis conducted post 9/11? It is reasonable to assume that given the violence of the September attacks the United States military was designated the primary focus of effort to counter these attacks, at least initially. If this is the case, there are two points to consider. First, they would have conducted a center of gravity analysis in accordance with doctrine published in Joint Publication 3-0 Doctrine for Joint Operations and Joint Publication 5.00-1 Joint Doctrine for Campaign Planning. The subsequent campaign in Operation Enduring Freedom and the diplomatic efforts that preceded it would indicate that an analysis was conducted and, while not privy to any actual documentation, the analysis likely determined that Osama bin Laden was the center of gravity. This was probably modified at a later date to include the core al-Qaeda leadership. Second, since the military would have conducted the analysis, it is also reasonable to assume that any resulting determinations would have a certain military prejudice and any recommendations that followed would emphasize traditional military approaches.

Osama bin Laden and the core al-Qaeda leadership are important to their organization. There is no question as to the necessity or desirability of eliminating both bin Laden and the al-Qaeda leadership. Eliminating them will reduce al-Qaeda’s effectiveness in conducting terrorist attacks and in providing a rallying point to spread their Jihadist ideology. Justice requires they pay for their part in the litany of assaults against the United States that culminated in the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. Their elimination is both part of the solution (attacking critical capabilities) to attacking the actual center of gravity and part of the campaign to destroy that

which threatens the United States. But as the analysis has shown, eliminating bin Laden and/or the core leadership group will not cause the al-Qaeda organization to implode and disappear into small groups of ineffective fundamentalists no longer capable of committing egregious acts of terrorism. To believe this ignores the realities posed by the al-Qaeda organization and denies the capabilities that globalization has made available to these 'super-empowered angry people.'<sup>60</sup> Simply put, this individual and this group are not the point on which the al-Qaeda organization hinges. This being the case, then the center of gravity analysis that was conducted failed to determine the true center of gravity and, while efforts conducted to date have been productive, they are misapplied, if applied in isolation, and against the wrong center of gravity.

### **THE ROAD AHEAD: RECOMMENDATIONS TO PROSECUTE THE WAR ON TERRORISM**

Thus, what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy.

—Sun Tzu, The Art of War

It would be comforting to be able to design a traditional campaign to counter the al-Qaeda threat that sequentially accomplished objectives leading to a determined end state. Unfortunately, due to the asymmetric nature of the threat, the immediacy of future attacks, and the potential consequences of WMD usage, the United States does not have that luxury. Strategically and operationally, the simultaneous integration and application of the elements of national power is the most viable approach to counter al-Qaeda. This will require a significant amount of coordination between the different organizations and agencies involved to achieve desired effects. Some elements such as the military and economic elements will produce demonstrable results in the near term. Diplomatic and informational elements need to begin their initiatives now in order to affect the conditions that enable al-Qaeda in the long term. Successfully accomplishing these long-term objectives will preserve the benefits gained from current, near term successes.

Current operations against al-Qaeda in the War on Terrorism appear to have used this integrated approach successfully to this point. However, indications are that the United States has focused its efforts on eliminating Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda leadership and it has not focused sufficient efforts against the actual center of gravity. All of the following recommendations should be applied immediately. These recommendations focus on Islamist ideology as al-Qaeda's center of gravity. Attacks on the identified critical capabilities and critical requirements are all warranted as overall objectives in the campaign.

## MILITARY INITIATIVES

“In the face of today’s new threat, the only way to pursue peace is to pursue those who threaten it.

—”President George W. Bush  
Address to the Nation  
October 7, 2001

The military element of national power is correctly engaged in countering the immediate, short-term threat to the United States, its citizens, allies, and interests as the other elements of national power are brought to bear on the actual center of gravity. In consonance with the National Security Strategy 2002, the United States must seek to preemptively destroy al-Qaeda operators and terrorist cells wherever they exist. Attrition must be the philosophical imperative and total elimination of the al-Qaeda leadership and operational units the common goal. Bluntly stated, the focus must be to kill or capture this leadership. Capturing personnel is preferable only if those seized can produce actionable information that can be used to further dismantle future operations. Practically, eliminating the leadership and critical operational personnel will inevitably diminish the organization’s ability to conduct operations, demoralize remaining members and adversely affect future recruiting. Additionally, it will remove the perceptions that the United States is unwilling to fight, *mano e mano*, and that al-Qaeda is operationally impervious to counteraction. Psychologically, it will begin the introduction of terror into the al-Qaeda’s organization and begin the process of breaking their will to perpetuate terrorist acts.

This type of ‘war’ is not the customary fare for the majority of America’s armed forces that are, in general, too heavy and slow to react both physically and with the required mental agility. Small, highly trained groups and individuals possessing a different mindset should be involved in and conduct these operations. All of those involved in this war must be able to free themselves from the conventional restraints in their conceptual thinking regarding the threat. They must be willing to consider ‘out of the box’ solutions in subsequent recommendations, plans, and operations. Most importantly, they must be willing to leave behind the bureaucratic ‘rice bowls’ and mindsets that created the seams and gaps enabling the attacks on September 11 and continue to inhibit effective responses required to successfully eliminate the threat posed by al-Qaeda. Elements of the United States Special Operations Command and the Central Intelligence Agency supported by naval expeditionary forces are ideally suited and capable of executing this mission. Prerequisites for success include possession of real time, ‘actionable’ intelligence fused from all national level sources and the ability to move rapidly and decisively.

Ideally, these operations are conducted in a clandestine and/or covert manner, out of the public eye and media reporting. While acknowledging that killing is a dirty business, there are several advantages to keeping operational engagements of this kind out of the media spotlight. Denying the rapid dissemination of vital information such as casualties incurred and personnel captured to the enemy has a positive operational impact. Second, non-reported incidents do not provide further rallying points to al-Qaeda gaining them greater sympathy and support in the Muslim world. Furthermore, it does not allow propagandists to create the perception of unjust heavy handedness on the part of the United States. Third, non-disclosure increases friendly operational security by not inadvertently releasing critical tactics, techniques and procedures. Finally, not revealing an elimination operation may preserve the cooperation and willingness of a fragile friendly government's ability to further contribute to the War on Terrorism whereas exposure could inhibit future cooperation.<sup>61</sup>

Recommending the targeting of individuals and/or specific cells inevitably leads to questions regarding assassination. Although the concept of targeting specific individuals/small groups is a harsh one, it is arguable that, in this unconventional war, it is merely the selective application of combat power against a declared enemy. Arguments against this specificity in targeting are old paradigm thinking reflecting out of date policy that does not acknowledge the realities of the threat posed by al-Qaeda.

The prohibition against assassination is contained in Executive Order 12333, not in statutory legislation. 12333 is the ultimate result of the 1975 Senate Committee hearings led by Senator Frank Church that concluded plotting by the Central Intelligence Agency and the methods they considered using "violates moral precepts fundamental to our way of life . . . We reject absolutely any notion that the United States should justify its actions by the standards of totalitarians . . . Of course, we must defend our democracy. But in defending it, we must resist undermining the very virtues we are defending."<sup>62</sup> The next year, President Gerald Ford signed the first executive order banning political assassination. In December 1981, President Ronald Reagan issued Executive Order 12333 "to provide for the effective conduct of United States intelligence activities and the protection of constitutional rights."<sup>63</sup> Specifically, Section 2.11 *Prohibition on Assassination* states, "No person employed by or acting on behalf of the United States Government shall engage in, or conspire to engage in, assassination."<sup>64</sup> What constitutes assassination is not defined in the Executive Order although a universally accepted definition is, "a murder by treacherous means."<sup>65</sup> As it is an Executive Order, it may be modified or canceled at the direction of the President.

Despite legitimate moral objections to killing, this policy needs to change. The elimination of Osama bin Laden and the leadership of al-Qaeda are objectively desirable. Their elimination would severely curtail future terrorist attacks and would assist in expediting the resolution of the attack on the center of gravity. Appealing to the greater good, the thousands of innocent lives saved worldwide is moral justification enough to support a policy modification.

Legally, the policy of pursuing, targeting and eliminating individuals and/or specific cells conforms to international law. Article 51 of the United Nations Charter recognizes a nation's right of self-defense in peacetime. Clearly, actions to prevent future 9/11 attacks, even if executed preemptively, can be considered acts of self-defense.<sup>66</sup> Al-Qaeda's declaration of war against the United States and subsequent terrorist actions would reasonably suffice to qualify it as a combatant organization, the members of which are recognized as legitimate targets. As to whether the actual leadership other than bin Laden could legally be targeted, recent publications reviewing the Nuremberg trials have concluded that, "Leaders, organizers, instigators, and accomplices participating in the formulation or execution of a common plan or conspiracy to commit any of the foregoing crimes are responsible for all acts performed by any persons in execution of such plan."<sup>67</sup> Despite objections by the squeamish and the moralists, this is an option that should be employed in earnest.

Throughout 2002, acknowledged operational successes would indicate that the United States has pursued this option. Although classified, it appears that a Presidential Finding issued in October 2001 has modified Executive Order 12333 as a result of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.<sup>68</sup> In late July 2002, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld directed the U.S. Special Operations Command to prepare a plan to find and deal with terrorists and terrorist organizations, stating "The objective is to capture terrorists for interrogation or, if necessary, to kill them, not simply to arrest them in a law-enforcement exercise."<sup>69</sup>

The Predator Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) strikes in Afghanistan (Nov 2001) and Yemen (Nov 2002), resulting in the deaths of al-Qaeda leaders Muhammed Atef and Qaed Sinan Harithi, respectively, is a solid indication that the United States has embarked on this path of resolution by attacking this critical capability. Whether in the form of a lone gunman, military hunter-killer teams waiting in ambush, Hellfire missiles launched from Predator drones, or targeted by cruise missiles the result is the same; terrorists are dead and their future operations are curtailed.

To enhance the future application of the military element of national power, three issues need to be resolved. First, the United States must effectively integrate Department of Defense and Interagency intelligence assets either by designing a separate organization or by

compelling organizational integration that crosses established bureaucratic boundaries to produce the best total intelligence picture possible. This intelligence must be 'actionable' in the sense that from the time information is received; it will be rapidly processed into a usable form and distributed to pre-staged forces ready to conduct mission planning and execution on the basis of the intelligence provided. That this has not occurred long ago is a failure of strategic proportions. This should not be confused with a center that fuses threat warnings and forces the United States to respond reactively. The recommended capability must acquire and develop sources and information faster than the enemy can react to its acquisition and the subsequent missions launched against it.

Second, it needs to be acknowledged that these types of operations are not without risk. 'Actionable' intelligence will not necessarily be perfect with 'all of the dots connected.' The key is to ensure, to the best of our ability, mission accomplishment and that we do not unnecessarily put our people at risk. Casualties will be unavoidable. Years of post Viet Nam conditioning has made the senior military leadership risk averse unconsciously resulting in a 'zero-defect' mentality in much of our force. Especially in this unique environment, missions will fail. The senior civilian leadership of the United States will need to stand behind operational decisions regardless of whether they are successful and not allow operational personnel to carry the burden of blame when this occurs.

Third, a decision must be made at the highest level that defines which roles and missions are performed by the Department of Defense and which ones are performed by the Central Intelligence Agency. Both organizations have the best interests of the nation at heart, but both are very different organizationally and culturally, and both are fielding forces in the same fight, on the same field, without the benefit of defined command relationships.<sup>70</sup> In the first year of the War on Terrorism there are many cases where elements from each organization have worked well together, particularly in Afghanistan. However, recently published accounts indicate that there may be more organizational friction and competition developing as the War on Terrorism continues.<sup>71</sup> As evidenced in PDD - 39, the unintended consequences of non-integrated operations are perilous at best.

### **ECONOMIC INITIATIVES**

A great deal of al-Qaeda's power derives from their extensive financial assets and the network that continues to supply them with funding from and through mosques, websites, charities, banks, governmental and non-governmental organizations. This takes advantage of the requirement for charity, one of the Five Pillars of Islam. While some of the contributions are

unintentionally diverted from legitimate causes, many donors are fully aware that their contributions are going to finance terrorist operations. In 2002, the Central Intelligence Agency tracked millions of dollars worth of fund transfers between Saudi Arabia and al-Qaeda and identified 12 prominent businessmen with ties to the Royal family as key backers.<sup>72</sup> The transparency of the international financial system is a critical vulnerability for al-Qaeda and allows an opportunity for the United States to leverage its technological advantages to eliminate this funding.

In order to do this the United States must implement the following recommendations:

First, it must implement greater oversight on charitable institutions and determine what their funding actually supports. This will expose charities that exist as al-Qaeda front organizations and will reduce unintentional funding from solicited contributions. Charities such as The International Islamic Relief Organization, The Wafa Humanitarian Organization, The Rabita Trust for Rehabilitation of Stranded Pakistanis, and the Qatar Charitable Society have all been proven to be contributories to al-Qaeda.<sup>73</sup>

Second, it must ensure that there is total cooperation and sharing of intelligence between the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Treasury Agency, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and other appropriate Federal agencies. As greater transparency is provided through computer analysis and tracking of financial transactions, al-Qaeda has sought alternate source funding particularly from illegal drug and diamond trafficking. Over the last several years, al-Qaeda has diversified its asset allocation, buying millions of dollars worth of 'war diamonds' from Sierra Leone and Burkina Faso.<sup>74</sup> Converting paper assets into tangibles such as gold and diamonds allows for non-observable storage of value and provides a relatively easy, albeit traditional, way to courier financial assets particularly in non-Western nations. Involving al-Qaeda in drug trafficking provides an extremely lucrative source of financing as well as the ability to utilize similar smuggling infrastructure for infiltration and exfiltration of weapons and operators. This mandated cooperation between Federal agencies must include expanding their intelligence collection to target 'offshore' financial institutions, businesses used for money laundering, and the 'Hawala' system of financial transaction used by many Arabs to transfer money without leaving a paper trail.

Third, the United States must expose the twelve financial backers identified by the Central Intelligence Agency and publish detailed accounts of how they are funding terrorism. While this is politically sensitive given alleged ties to the Royal family, it will publicly shed light on specific individuals and questionable transactions that most will not want revealed. For too long the

United States has allowed the Saudi government to work both ends against the middle. It can no longer publicly side with the United States particularly against external threats and reward al-Qaeda by appeasing its supporters internally.

Fourth, it must consider confronting the Saudi government with the threat of reduction or elimination of military aid if it is unwilling to change the status quo. However, this is a double-edged sword. Any reductions in aid will have an adverse effect on American defense-related industries and foreign military sales and could negatively affect Saudi cooperation regarding the use of airspace and land basing areas for operations against Iraq. Ultimately, the greatest counter-threat the Kingdom possesses is the ability to reduce oil production

Fifth, a more positive approach is to detail emerging information indicating that Islamists are planning attacks against the Royal family and the Kingdom's petroleum industry infrastructure. This should help persuade the Royal family to discontinue any form of financial support to the terrorists and provide greater transparency of financial operations originating from inside the Kingdom.<sup>75</sup>

Sixth, the most significant contribution the United States could make using the economic element of national power is to undertake the research required to develop alternate energy sources and develop an implementation plan that would wean the United States from fossil fuel dependency. This is a completely self-contained initiative that this country can implement in a relatively short period of time if it is made a national imperative with appropriate resources dedicated to its fulfillment. It is estimated that one out of every seven barrels of oil is consumed on American highways.<sup>76</sup> More fossil fuels are used in home heating. In addition to the development of alternate energy sources, designing more efficient, lighter vehicles could further reduce this consumption considerably within a few years. The dependence of America and the Western world on petroleum and natural gas has held the West hostage to the stability of the Middle East and the demands of extremists for too long.

### **INFORMATION OPERATIONS**

Using the informational element of national power may be the most effective of all the elements in attacking Islamist ideology, the center of gravity. This requires a forward looking, comprehensive campaign on the part of the United States. As this is a classic battle for the hearts and minds of the Muslim world, at the heart of the issue is the battle for Islam and how each side perceives the organization of the world. It is critical to remember that it is not our perspective that is important, but that of the young Islamist and the undecided. For the Islamists, their world is Islamic. How the world is divided is irrelevant. For the Western world,

the survival of the state and the protection of individual rights is of primary importance. Both of these perspectives result from the different cultural and physical environments from which each developed. The key will be to convince the Islamists that they have more to gain by living in this world and accommodating modernity than they do by dying to get to the next world.

In order to shape the future, the United States must do the following:

First, it must initiate an information operations campaign. The campaign must provide an immediate counter to al-Qaeda propaganda in the ongoing battle to influence people's perceptions. The Al-Jazeera satellite network already provides a superb venue to begin to expose the Muslim world to alternate viewpoints. Reports of previous interviews and debates with Americans have been widely acclaimed.<sup>77</sup> Part of the campaign needs to highlight the positions of the American government but other portions should include coordinated messages emanating from Saudi Arabia, Gulf Cooperative Council members and other Arab and Muslim nations that reinforce similar themes. This, of course, must be followed through with positive, tangible action.

The other part of the campaign must exploit al-Qaeda's critical vulnerabilities. Its main vulnerability is its inability to define how the Islamist version of Islam can lead the Islamic world forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and reestablish itself as a great civilization. If al-Qaeda is unable to articulate this conceptual integration, and so far it has not been able to do so, then the only realistic conclusion is that it intends to return the world back to a medieval past. This regression has already been attempted in Iran in 1979. Within a generation, people want more than just fundamentalist religion. They want inclusion in a progressive world, one that will enhance their quality of life; otherwise it will leave them behind, intellectually, socially, economically, and developmentally. This current episode of fundamentalist terrorism has not arisen despite the progress the world has made, but because of it.<sup>78</sup>

Another critical vulnerability that must be exploited is the status of women throughout much of the Muslim world. A society that is unable to reconcile the integration and involvement of half its population will not be able to successfully contribute or compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Women, who as mothers are the life-givers, should be the antithesis of Islamist desire to die as martyrs. By providing a vision of the future that is realistically obtainable and defines how Muslim women and children can accommodate both their religion and modernity, it should be possible to gain their overwhelming support. Muslim societies that already have accomplished this already exist in North America and Asia providing a roadmap of the possible.

Second, the United States must clandestinely support authentic and legitimate Muslim clerics who will come forward with a message of moderation and reform. The issue of Islamist

terrorism and the hijacking of Islam can only be resolved by Islamic societies themselves. Fundamentally, they must make a choice, either return to the 7<sup>th</sup> century and all that it entails or find the way to incorporate the true meaning of Islam into the modern world. This has happened in other countries outside of the Middle East. But it has been the status quo functioning of current Middle Eastern governments that has not allowed that integration to take place. Without the leadership of a dissenting voice, the Islamist interpretation of Islam moves forward like a bully unchallenged. Interestingly, that counter fundamentalist may have arisen in the form of Hashem Aghajari, an Iranian Shiite, former Islamic revolutionary and college professor, who was recently sentenced to death for preaching the need for 'Islamic Protestantism' and reformation.<sup>79</sup> His case is currently being appealed.

Third, the United States must use the weight of its technological advantage to conduct computer network attacks and exploitation against al-Qaeda. This includes actions and capabilities, many classified, that shut down sites as they are established; create sites to publish opposing ideological viewpoints and facts as interpreted by the rest of the world; and to pass disinformation where appropriate. This will hinder al-Qaeda's use of the Internet for operational purposes, interfere with financial transactions and solicitation, and allow for a competing view of Islam to be considered.

### **DIPLOMATIC/POLITICAL INITIATIVES**

The efforts of the diplomatic/political element of national power must be focused on creating and implementing policies to de-legitimize, thus defeat, the Islamist ideology of al-Qaeda. Successfully accomplishing this will achieve the long-term resolution sought by the United States in the War on Terrorism and provide the countries and, more importantly, the people of the Middle East an opportunity to progress into the future. The impact of this success will dampen Islamic fundamentalism wherever it appears worldwide. Unfortunately, diplomacy and political pressure are not employed with a guaranteed cause and effect relationship. Given the inflamed situation in the Middle East, there may be few overt measures the United States can employ with predictable results. Recognizing this and acting accordingly will require a great deal of patience and fortitude. The United States can diplomatically recommend and support initiatives, but the impetus for change must come from the people and governments within the region. Despite its global nature, the greatest opportunity to de-legitimize al-Qaeda is in the place of its birth, the Middle East.

As the world's only superpower and for a variety of strategic reasons, the United States must remain involved in the Middle East. How it remains involved and what form that presence

requires remains to be seen. Traditionally, American strategic interests in the Middle East have centered on ensuring regional stability, guaranteeing the security of Israel, and providing access to the uninterrupted flow of oil at reasonable prices.<sup>80</sup> With these interests secured, the United States left internal matters to the host nations not particularly concerned with the impact on the people and their quality of life.

As a result, three issues routinely form the basis for the reported discontent expressed by the people in the Middle East. All of these issues focus on the United States and its Middle East policy. All are used by al-Qaeda to give legitimacy to their movement and ideology.

Unquestionably, the most widespread grievance concerns the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and the unilateral support the United States provides Israel. The second issue is the continuing presence of United States military forces throughout the Middle East since the end of the Persian Gulf War. This has two dimensions; the first is the five thousand plus personnel stationed in Saudi Arabia whose presence is seen as defiling sacred ground, 'The Land of the Two Holy Places'. The second is the continued pressure levied against the regime of Saddam Hussein that, in Arab/Muslim eyes, is really unequal pressure being exerted against the Iraq people. The third issue is the unequivocal support provided by the United States to the unresponsive, sometimes repressive, Middle Eastern governments. While these grievances are grounded in reality, the external focus on and ability to blame the United States deflects attention away from the real cause of the discontent, which is the inability of Middle Eastern governments to reconcile their failure to adequately provide the basic requirements for living and the hope of a future for their people.

In most countries, the obsessive focus on regime survival underlies every decision made. This and the maintenance of the favored few have resulted in an unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity for the majority of the disenfranchised. Each country is burdened with a rapidly growing population, limited educational opportunities and even more limited prospects for future employment. The tightly controlled media does not allow for the expression of divergent opinion internally or contrasting and/or unfavorable reports of international news externally. Government security services ruthlessly repress dissent, again choosing instead to focus grievances externally away from current regimes. There is no transparency in the existing ruling structures that allows for accountability to the people. The quandary, of course, is any attempt to introduce this transparency is vulnerable to hijacking by fundamentalists who would obviously not support the privilege of the ruling elite. It takes no stretch of imagination to understand that it is from these conditions that the Islamist movement draws growing support and followers. Continued repression and corruption reinforces the concept that whatever happens in this life is

temporal, yet just another steppingstone to the better, more rewarding afterlife. With the disenfranchised majority no longer willing to accept the status quo and its inherent corruption, more and more people are willing to try any other system that will promise improvement including al-Qaeda's seductive lure of returning to past grandeur.

Al-Qaeda capitalizes on these grievances. While continuing their genuinely focused religious crusade against the "infidels" represented by the United States and the West, they pursue their actual regional goal which is the removal of the existing ruling elites throughout the Arab world. By attacking the United States, Israel, moderate Muslims, and positive attempts at reform, Islamists ensure that progress will not be achieved and solutions and stability will not be attained.<sup>81</sup> The United States, whose strategic interests of oil and regional stability have continued to be served by these existing rulers, is not without fault in that it has not previously acknowledged fundamental differences between the countries and cultures and, therefore, has not had to confront and resolve them.<sup>82</sup>

Saudi Arabia, in its unique position as the 'Keeper of the Two Holy Places', has the opportunity to display the innovation and the leadership necessary to resolve the underlying causes of this discontent within its own country and set the precedent for change throughout the rest of the Middle East. However, instead of seizing the initiative and nurturing progressive change, the Saudi government has routinely chosen to preserve its ruling status. This choice has placed the Royal family in a dilemma. As previously noted, the Saudis came to power through an alliance with the extremely fundamentalist Wahhabis. The Saudis would enforce this orthodox interpretation of Islam and the Wahhabis would support the expansion of the Saudi state and give legitimacy and responsibility as the caretaker of Islamic orthodoxy to the Saudi family.<sup>83</sup> Later, the discovery and subsequent exploitation of natural petroleum resources brought excessive wealth, not to Saudi Arabia, but to the House of Saud. Within years, the more than five thousand Saudi royal princes became accustomed to the continual flow of billions of dollars in oil revenues much of which went into their private bank accounts. The ensuing exorbitant, un-Islamic lifestyle they began to live contrasted greatly with the fundamentalist Wahhabism that brought them to the throne and gave them the legitimacy to remain in power. This remains a continual point of friction with the non-royal Saudis who must live within the strict guidelines enforced by the Wahhabis. The turning point for many came during and after the Persian Gulf War. Although the Wahhabi clerics grudgingly gave their assent for foreign troops to respond to the immediacy of the Iraqi threat, the average Saudi had trouble understanding the rationale behind the Kingdom's need to contract a foreign army after having spent nearly thirty per cent of the kingdom's diminishing oil revenues every year for more

weapons.<sup>84</sup> When the United States did not remove its forces at the end of the conflict, public ire turned against the regime. In the face of declining oil revenues, the inability to defend the oilfields against terrorist threat and with a growing disenchantment among the people, Prince Abdullah, the leading contender to succeed King Fahd and the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia today, chose to appease the Wahhabis and, in turn, the Islamists. It is from here that a significant amount of al-Qaeda's funding originates. A genuinely pious man himself, Abdullah has been unsuccessful in his efforts to reform other members of the Royal family.

The Royal family must resolve this dichotomy. Either they must moderate their public behavior and become the catalyst to promote a progressive interpretation of Islam, one that can reach out to the disenfranchised and lead them through Islam into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, or they can continue to appease the Islamists. In view of the lack of external threat, it is, unfortunately likely that they will choose the latter. Their delay in confronting the Islamist challenge under the current conditions may result in their finding themselves more vulnerable, facing greater threats in the future.

The United States finds itself held "hostage to the stability of the Saudi system," because of its dependence on Saudi oil and because of military requirements to access to Saudi airspace needed to enable current operations against Iraq.<sup>85</sup> Western, non-Muslim entities can only support the internal struggle from the shadows. The United States is forced by the nature of the threat to use all elements of national power with all but the military in the lead. This is the exact opposite of what it is used to. Second, the United States is the object of the terrorist attacks, but may not be able to prevent the causes. This quandary extends to the Saudis as well. If the US supports the status quo and nothing changes, al-Qaeda continues to receive funding, unofficial sanctuary to some degree and a continual supply of loyal followers. If the United States does not support the regime and the regime falls, then al-Qaeda gains immeasurably as they become further legitimized as the 'Keepers of the Two Holy Places.' If the US supports the current regime and the regime changes, depending on how it changes, the best-case result may be a draw.

There are, however, two recommendations that the United States can undertake diplomatically that will enhance the prospects for Saudi regime reform and de-legitimize al-Qaeda's appeal. The first is to reengage in the process to resolve the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The United States cannot override the sovereign prerogatives of the State of Israel, but it can use the annual three billion dollars in overt foreign aid it provides as leverage to force the Israelis to stop the settlement movement and begin dismantling those that exist inside the West Bank and Gaza. This will begin to remove the major irritant in this conflict. The United States

has already taken a significant step forward in committing to an independent Palestinian state. It can work to that goal and to final conflict resolution after it settles the Iraqi issue. To do so, the United States must be willing to confront the realities of its domestic politics regarding Israel. With critical electoral votes from New York, Florida and California heavily influenced by lobbies of Jewish voters, the United States has little maneuver room in finding a reasonable solution to this conflict that does not favor Israel. A legitimate chance at a realistic peace agreement in the future will be subject to the results of current operations against Iraq and the installation of new Palestinian leadership.

The second recommendation is to have the United States withdraw all of its forces from Saudi Arabia. This needs to occur rapidly but not with much fanfare or media coverage that would add to the perception that the United States was fulfilling an al-Qaeda demand. A strategic redeployment after operations in Iraq would suffice as a solid cover. The American 'burden' can be distributed and absorbed by the states of the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) with Army components basing in Kuwait, Navy components basing in Bahrain, and Air Force components basing in Qatar not to mention Iraq upon cessation of hostilities. Once the removal of forces from Saudi Arabia is accomplished it would reduce a serious friction point with many Muslims, begin to de-legitimize al-Qaeda's greatest grievance, and would begin to restore some legitimacy to the Saudi Royal family. For the long term, the reduction of the American military presence throughout the Middle East, particularly that which is land based, should be a strategic goal.

## **CONCLUSION**

America faces an unprecedented challenge: it has little choice but to prevail in the War on Terrorism. While not seeking a clash of civilizations, that decision may not be a choice controlled by the United States. This referendum will likely be determined on the streets of the Arab Middle East. For the vast majority of those in the Middle East, Western style economics, political institutions and warfare have only brought poverty, repression, and defeat, respectively.<sup>86</sup> It is, therefore, not surprising that Islamist ideology is becoming more attractive to a greater global audience who is "willing to listen to voices telling them that the old Islamic ways were best and that their only salvation was to throw aside the pagan innovations of the reformers and return to the True Path that God had prescribed for this people."<sup>87</sup> It is questionable whether, at this point, the proverbial clash of civilizations can be avoided.

Center of gravity analysis is a useful tool, one that focuses efforts and resources. But it is only a tool that must be used with caution and "not degenerate into a search for a 'silver bullet;'

a way to find some magic pressure point that can be surgically attacked, avoiding the enemy's strength, in order to bring down the whole enemy structure. The reality is that the enemy, especially the terrorist network, is complex and does not lend itself to logical cause and effect linkages that are the basis for center of gravity analysis.<sup>88</sup> The United States should review its current center of gravity analysis to ensure that national efforts are accurately focused on attacking and de-legitimizing al-Qaeda's Islamist ideology.

Both in the conduct of the War on Terrorism and in the conduct of ongoing diplomatic relations the United States would do well to consider the Middle East region holistically instead of separating and compartmentalizing issues on a nation state basis. An examination of the existing policies that have given rise to legitimate grievances, including the historical impact that Western powers have had in the Middle East, consideration for the root problems endemic to the region, and a greater appreciation of the power of and conflict inside Islam, will produce more feasible solutions to accomplish America's strategic goals in the region.

If a clash of civilizations is to be, then the United States must engage that clash from an unequivocal position of strength and power. It must not be afraid of being powerful and, if required, unilateral in its approach. Despite being involuntarily thrust into the role of benevolent hegemon as the world's sole superpower, the United States must not confuse being liked with being respected. This Machiavellian concept where "power, not popularity, is the most important factor for political success"<sup>89</sup> is thoroughly understood throughout the Middle East. Although vacillating segments of the western world may not appreciate this sudden show of strength, the United States must maintain its resolve, something that has been found wanting at other times and places in recent history. Striking hard, fast, and with ferocity will send a clear message to those that seek to attack the United States and the values for which it stands.

In the long term, establishing a true peace between Israel and the Palestinian State, ensuring governmental reform throughout the region, extending support for moderation and providing the economic opportunity to attain a better quality of life for the average Middle Easterner will create the conditions that de-legitimize the Islamist ideology of al-Qaeda.

WORD COUNT = 15,671

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Karen Armstrong, *A History of God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 132.

<sup>2</sup> Armstrong's *A History of God* is a superb treatise regarding the polytheistic environment that preceded Muhammad's revelations and the subsequent challenges he faced when introducing Islam to the Arabian Peninsula.

<sup>3</sup> LTC James P. Nelson, *X-LAM: ROOTS OF TERROR AND THE BATTLE AHEAD*, Strategy Research Project (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 9 April 2002) XX.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Friedman *Longitudes & Attitudes* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2002), 311.

<sup>9</sup> PBS online and wgbh/frontline, "About the Bin Laden Family," 2001; available from <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/who/family.htm>>; Internet; accessed 23 November 2002.

<sup>10</sup> The degree that bin Laden received was in civil engineering, economics, public administration, or management depending on which source is quoted.

<sup>11</sup> Ahmed S. Hashim, "The World According To Osama Bin Laden," date; available from <<http://www.nwc.navy.mil/press/Review/2001/Autumn/art1-au1.htm>>; Internet; accessed 4 June 2002.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Government Fact Sheet on Usama Bin Ladin, available at <<http://usembassy.state.gov/afghanistan/www/htr01.htm>>; Internet; accessed 23 November 2002. Azzam is considered by many to be a founder of the HAMAS movement as well.

<sup>13</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside al-Qaeda – Global Network of Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 21.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Anne Weaver, "The Real bin Laden," 24 January 2000; available from <[http://www.newyorker.com/printable/?archive/010924fr\\_archive03](http://www.newyorker.com/printable/?archive/010924fr_archive03)>; Internet; accessed 20 November 2002.

Overarching national security issues must be considered in context of the times. Defeating the Soviet Union was the priority. How it happened and who did it were, at the time, irrelevant.

From the author: The C.I.A. station chief in Pakistan from 1986 to 1989 was Milt Bearden, an avuncular, barrel-chested man with an easy smile. He arrived with the first shipments of Stinger missiles that Washington dispatched to the combatants, and he spent a good deal of time in the mountains with the resistance groups. Not long ago, I asked Bearden, who is now retired, if he had known bin Laden during the war years.

"No," he replied. "Did I know that he was out there? Yes, I did, but did I say that this tall, slim, ascetic Saudi was instrumental? No, I did not. There were a lot of bin Ladens who came to do jihad, and they unburdened us a lot. These guys were bringing in up to twenty to twenty-five million dollars a month from other Saudis and Gulf Arabs to underwrite the war. And that is a lot of money. It's an extra two hundred to three hundred million dollars a year. And this is what bin Laden did. He spent most of the war as a fund-raiser, in Peshawar. He was not a valiant warrior on the battlefield."

According to Bearden, bin Laden and the Saudi contingent "fought in only one important battle that I know of: the battle of Ali Khel"—in Paktia province, not far from the area struck by United States cruise missiles in August of 1998. "The Soviets ran out of steam just before we ran out of supplies. There were perhaps twenty or twenty-five Saudi shaheeds"—martyrs. Bin Laden, fighting under the nom de guerre Abu Abdullah, appeared to have modelled himself on the twelfth-century military hero Salah al-Din, who effectively checked the Crusaders and reconquered Jerusalem.

"As time went on," Bearden told me, "the story of the battle of Ali Khel grew, as did that of the Saudis' battlefield role. Part of the myth of bin Laden and of the Saudi fighters sprang from this. The U.S. government, along with others, sang the ballad of the Saudi shaheeds, and, dollar for dollar, King Fahd matched our funds. We put five hundred million dollars into Afghanistan in 1987 alone, and the Saudis matched us bill for bill."

This compared to Rohan Gunaratna's *Inside al-Qaeda – Global Network of Terror*, 21.

<sup>15</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda – Global Network of Terror*, 25.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Hashim, "The World According To Osama Bin Laden", 9

<sup>18</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda – Global Network of Terror*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Hashim, "The World According To Osama Bin Laden", 9.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda – Global Network of Terror*, 5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>25</sup> PBS.Org/frontline, "Interview with Larry Johnson,"; available from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/interviews/newjohnson.html>; Internet; accessed 23 November 2002.

<sup>26</sup> Federation of American Scientists, "al-Qu'ida (The Base),"; available from <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ladin/htm>; Internet; accessed 15 November 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "Terrorism: Questions & Answers," available from <<http://www.terrorismanswers.com/groups/alqaeda3.html>>; Internet; accessed 15 November 2002. Statement found in an al-Qaeda safehouse in Afghanistan by NY Times reporters. Entitled "Goals and Objectives of Jihad".

<sup>28</sup> Osama Bin Laden, "Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders." 23 February 1998; available from <<http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>>; Internet; accessed 4 November 2002.

<sup>29</sup> William J. Clinton, "Presidential Decision Directive-39 U.S. Policy on Counterterrorism," 21 June 1995; available from <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd39.htm>; Internet; accessed 25 September 2002. Initially classified, it has been released minus redacted portions.

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Patterns of Global Terrorism – 2001," May 2002; available from <<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2001/pdf/>>. Internet; accessed 22 September 2002. DOS, through its Office of Counterterrorism, has the primary responsibility for developing, coordinating, and implementing American CT policy.

<sup>31</sup> Raphael F. Perl, "Terrorism, the Future, and U.S. Foreign Policy," 17 December 2001; available from <<http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/7941.pdf>>; Internet; accessed 23 September 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., CRS-3

<sup>33</sup> Clinton, "Presidential Decision Directive-39 U.S. Policy on Counterterrorism", 2, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Bruce Hoffman, Inside Terrorism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 37-38. Specifically:

"Department of State uses the definition contained in Title 22 of United States Code, Section 2656f(d): premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience.

The FBI defines terrorism as: the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a Government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.

US Department of Defense defines it as: the unlawful use of – or threatened use of – force or violence against individuals or property to coerce or intimidate governments or societies, often to achieve political, religious, or ideological objectives."

<sup>35</sup> Mary Anne Weaver, "The Real bin Laden," 24 January 2000; available from <[http://www.newyorker.com/printable/?archive/010924fr\\_archive03](http://www.newyorker.com/printable/?archive/010924fr_archive03)>; Internet; accessed 20 November 2002.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Perle, "Frontline: Interview Richard Perle," Mid-October 2001; available from <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/gunning/interviews/perle.html>>; Internet;

accessed 14 October 2002. Conclusion stated by the author. Support for the conclusion is found in this quote by Mr. Perle, "Ten years ago, Al Qaeda was nothing. We watched it grow, because after each terrorist act, it was stronger than before. We never challenged it. We never took significant action against it. And these acts of terror were regarded as great triumphs and the basis upon which Al Qaeda became a magnet for people who want to destroy us. ..."

<sup>38</sup> Coordinator for Counterterrorism Ambassador at large Michael Sheehan of the Department of State, conversation with the author, 14 March 2000, Washington, D.C.

<sup>39</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 595.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 605.

<sup>41</sup> There are several specific references to this throughout *On War*. On page 75, "War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will." Page 90, "war,...cannot be considered to have ended so long as the enemy's will has not been broken."

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 617. However, Clausewitz does allow for the possibility of more than one COG in certain cases. On page 619, conceptually he states, "The first task, then, in planning for a war is to identify the enemy's center of gravity, and if possible trace it back to a single one."

<sup>43</sup> Dr. Joe Strange, *Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clausewitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language*. Marine Corps University Perspectives on Warfighting, Number Four, 2d ed (Quantico, Virginia.: Defense Automated Printing Service Center, 1996), 33.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>46</sup> LTC Antulio Echevarria II, *Clausewitz's Center Of Gravity: Changing Our Warfighting Doctrine-Again!*, (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College. Carlisle, Pennsylvania. September 2002), 12.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 11

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-18.

<sup>51</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda – Global Network of Terror*, 79.

<sup>52</sup> George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President at 2002 Graduation Exercise of the United States Military Academy West Point, New York," 1 June 2002, available from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html>>; Internet, accessed 15 December 2002.

<sup>53</sup> George W. Bush, Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 20 September 2001), XX.

<sup>54</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Patterns of Global Terrorism – 2001," May 2002; available from <<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2001/pdf/>>; Internet; accessed 22 September 2002, xi.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., X.

<sup>56</sup> George W. Bush, "Press Conference on 11 October 2001," 11 October 2001; available from <<http://www.johnstonsarchinve.net/terrorism/bush911e.html>>; Internet; accessed 15 November 2002.

<sup>57</sup> George W. Bush, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," September 2002; available from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>>; Internet; accessed 7 October 2002, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>60</sup> Friedman, Longitudes and Attitudes, 45.

<sup>61</sup> Seymour Hersh, "Manhunt," 23 December 2002, available from <[http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?021223fa\\_fact](http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?021223fa_fact)>; Internet; accessed 5 January 2003, 8.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>63</sup> Ronald Reagan, "United States Intelligence Activities Executive Order 12333," 4 December 1981; available from <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/information/eo12333.html>>; Internet; accessed 15 November 2002, Preamble.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 2.11.

<sup>65</sup> Casper Weinberger, "When Can We Target the Leaders?"; available from <<http://www.debateadict.com/mail-archieve/parli-student/MayJun2001/0094.shtml>>; Internet.; accessed 21 October 2002, 22.

<sup>66</sup> General Sir Hugh Beach and David Fisher, "Terrorism, Assassination and International Justice," available from <[http://www.isisuk.demon.co.uk/0811/isis/uk/regpapers/no80\\_paper.html](http://www.isisuk.demon.co.uk/0811/isis/uk/regpapers/no80_paper.html)>; Internet; accessed 25 September 2002, 7.

<sup>67</sup> Weinberger, 21.

<sup>68</sup> Beach and Fisher, 11.

<sup>69</sup> Hersh, 3.

<sup>70</sup> Douglas Waller, "The CIAs Secret Army," 26 January 2003; available from <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1101030203-411370,00.html>>; Internet; accessed 27 January 2003.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> World Tribune.com, "CIA: Saudis still sending tens of millions to Al Qaida"; available from <[http://216.26.163.62/2002/me\\_saudis\\_11\\_27.htm](http://216.26.163.62/2002/me_saudis_11_27.htm)>; Internet; accessed 27 November 2002.

<sup>73</sup> Steven Emerson, "Fund-Raising Methods and Procedures for International Terrorist Organizations. Testimony before the House Committee on Financial Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations," 12 February 2002; available from <<http://financialservices.house.gov/media/pdf/021202se.pdf>>; Internet; accessed 15 October 2002.

<sup>74</sup> Douglas Farah, "Report Says Africans Harbored Al Qaeda," Washington Post, 29 December 2002, Page A01.

<sup>75</sup> Romesh Ratnesar, "A Twist of the Arm," Time, 9 December 2002, p. X.

<sup>76</sup> Friedman, Longitudes and Attitudes, 143.

<sup>77</sup> Mohammed el-Nawawy, "US Should Wake Up And Use Al-Jazeera"; available from <<http://ebird.dtic.mil/Nov2002/s20021118us.htm>>; Internet; accessed 18 November 2002.

<sup>78</sup> Ralph Peters, "Rolling Back Radical Islam," Parameters. 17 (Autumn 2002): 7.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas Friedman, "An Islamic Reformation," New York Times, 4 December 2002, A10.

<sup>80</sup> William J. Clinton, The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (Washington, D.C.: The White House, February 1996), 42-43.

<sup>81</sup> Barry Rubin, "The Real Roots of Arab Anti-Americanism," November-December 2002; available from <<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20021101faessay9993/barry-rubin/the-real-roots-of-arab-anti-americanism.html>>; Internet; accessed 5 November 2002.

<sup>82</sup> Robert G. Kaiser and David B. Ottaway, "Marriage of Convenience: The U.S.-Saudi Alliance," Washington Post, 10 February 2002, 1.

<sup>83</sup> Joshua Teitelbaum, "Deserted. Why Riyadh Stiffs America," 22 October 2001; available from <<http://www.tnr.com/102201/teitelbaum102201.htm>>; Internet; accessed 5 January 2003.

<sup>84</sup> Leslie and Andrew Cockburn, "Royal Mess," 28 November 1994; available at <[http://www.newyorker.com/archive/content/?011015fr\\_archive01](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/content/?011015fr_archive01)>; Internet.; accessed 15 November 2002.

<sup>85</sup> Seymour M. Hersh, "King's Ransom," 22 October 2001; available from <[http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?011022fa\\_FACT1](http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?011022fa_FACT1)>; Internet; accessed 25 September 2002.

<sup>86</sup> Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," September 1990; available from <<http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/90sep/rage.htm>>; Internet; accessed 28 November 2002.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>88</sup> LtCol Phillip Ridderhof, USMC <Ridderhofph@hqmc.usmc.mil> , “The MCDP Project: Marine Corps Doctrine and the “New Reality,” electronic mail message to LtCol Stephen Davis <stephen.davis@carlisle.army.mil>, 15 December 2002.

<sup>89</sup> Rubin, XX.



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