

## INTEGRATING THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION INTO U.S. MILITARY STRATEGY

BY

CHAPLAIN (LIEUTENANT COLONEL) THOMAS L. SOLHJEM  
United States Army

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A:

Approved for Public Release.  
Distribution is Unlimited.

USAWC CLASS OF 2009

This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.



U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050

The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle State Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

**REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE**Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 24-03-2009		<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> Strategy Research Project		<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b>	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b>  Integrating the Religious Dimension into U.S. Military Strategy				<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Chaplain (LTC) Thomas L. Solhjem				<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b>  Professor Harry R. Yarger Department of National Security & Strategy				<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>	
				<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b>	
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Distribution A: Unlimited					
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b>					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> The United States is embroiled in a historic seventh year of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Military policy and strategy should provide clear understanding of the challenge and a consensus on the way ahead. However, some argue U.S. policy and military strategy do not reflect a genuine understanding of our enemy's motivations, purposes, and methods. Without such understanding, al Qaeda remains a Hydra-like menace, and the U.S. remains beleaguered in its attempts to foster freedom and democracy among people with a different religion that profoundly influences culture and ideological domains. It is time to comprehend the religious dimensions in 21 <sup>st</sup> century warfare. Only then can we "understand" and formulate proper policy and strategy to meet the religious challenges in the GWOT. The U.S. needs strategic religious understanding in order to combat terrorism and establish appropriate national military objectives, ways, and means. This paper identifies the appropriate objectives and argues ways and means. The way is better integration of the religious strategic dimension capabilities and capacities into the national military strategy for the GWOT. The means is special operations forces (SOF) to achieve our strategic objectives.					
<b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Al Qaeda, Culture, Warfare, Belief, Ideology, Terrorism					
<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b>	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
<b>a. REPORT</b> UNCLASSIFIED	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b> UNCLASSIFIED	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b> UNCLASSIFIED			UNLIMITED



USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**INTEGRATING THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION INTO U.S. MILITARY STRATEGY**

by

Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) Thomas L. Solhjem  
United States Army

Professor Harry R. Yarger  
Project Adviser

This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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



## **ABSTRACT**

AUTHOR: Chaplain (LTC) Thomas L. Solhjem  
TITLE: Integrating the Religious Dimension into U.S. Military Strategy  
FORMAT: Strategy Research Project  
DATE: 24 March 2009      WORD COUNT: 5,816      PAGES: 28  
KEY TERMS: Al Qaeda, Culture, Warfare, Belief, Ideology, Terrorism  
CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

The United States is embroiled in a historic seventh year of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Military policy and strategy should provide clear understanding of the challenge and a consensus on the way ahead. However, some argue U.S. policy and military strategy do not reflect a genuine understanding of our enemy's motivations, purposes, and methods. Without such understanding, al Qaeda remains a Hydra-like menace, and the U.S. remains beleaguered in its attempts to foster freedom and democracy among people with a different religion that profoundly influences culture and ideological domains. It is time to comprehend the religious dimensions in 21<sup>st</sup> century warfare. Only then can we "understand" and formulate proper policy and strategy to meet the religious challenges in the GWOT. The U.S. needs strategic religious understanding in order to combat terrorism and establish appropriate national military objectives, ways, and means. This paper identifies the appropriate objectives and argues ways and means. The way is better integration of the religious strategic dimension capabilities and capacities into the national military strategy for the GWOT. The means is special operations forces (SOF) to achieve our strategic objectives.



## INTEGRATING THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION INTO U.S. MILITARY STRATEGY

In a world which has lost its transcendental significance, culture serves to sanction those barbarous traditions which God is no longer in a position to endorse. Fanaticism is indefensible when it appeals to heaven, but beyond reproach when it is grounded in antiquity and cultural distinctiveness.

—Alain Finkielkraut  
The Undoing of Thought 1988

The 9/11 attacks were not the beginning of the GWOT. In fact, these attacks simply awakened a sleeping giant. The United States responded by declaring war on al Qaeda, all other associated terrorist networks, and those who harbor them. However, war had already been declared on the United States and its allies in a 23 August 1996 *fatwa* (an Islamic religious decree) issued by Osama bin Laden.<sup>1</sup> Bin Laden issued a second *fatwa in 1998* calling on all Muslims to kill Americans and their allies, civilian or military.<sup>2</sup> Al Qaeda operatives then carried out two simultaneous attacks on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing over 220 people and injuring scores of others. Additionally, terrorists attacked the USS Cole in Yemen and plotted against the United States and its allies prior to 9/11.<sup>3</sup> The giant was awakened and struck out at those who threaten it, but the United States has yet to comprehend the true nature of the threat. Until the United States understands the role of religion in the GWOT, it cannot formulate a successful military strategy.

### The Real Challenge

Bin Laden's second in command is his Egyptian born *spiritual advisor* and doctor, Ayman al Zawahiri. Al Zawahiri was a planner, chief ideologue, and the "strategic/operational" brains behind the 9/11 attacks and current al Qaeda efforts.

Open source intelligence reporting claims that designating al Zawahiri as bin Laden's right-hand man may understate his importance. Many analysts believe Zawahiri has been controlling much of al Qaeda's finance operations since the end of the Soviet Union's war in Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> This volatile team built their terrorist organizational message, model, and mission around a religious theme and base. Fatwas are important. There is no denying the religious dimension in what al Qaeda propagates, and there is no limit to the extent they will go to achieve their objectives. Their religion justifies their ends, ways, and means. This ought to concern and focus military strategists on the religious dimension of warfare.

As a matter of U.S. military strategy, does the military understand and integrate the religious dimension into U.S. military strategy? The answer is no! Simply put, from the enemy's vantage point: this war is all about religion. In Clausewitzian terms religion is "...the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends....it is the point against which all our energies should be directed."<sup>5</sup> Religion is al Qaeda's strategic center of gravity. Unfortunately, the U.S. military has a strong cultural aversion to addressing religious issues. Discerning the religious dimension of warfare, and the quagmire of domestic and international hostility its exploitation can create, requires a perspective and companion art that is not understood or appreciated by "secular leaning" military strategists. The failure to give proper attention to and integration of the religious dimension to strategy formation hampers our ability to curtail the violent misuse of religion by evil men.

A starting point in examining the role of religion in strategy is considering the enemy's strategic framework and use of the religious dimension to achieve their

objectives. Such analysis suggests they are engaged in a religious war and U.S. strategists must come to terms with this. There is, however, some validity in their aversion. Strategists must avoid the risks of being drawn into a cultural war, or what Samuel Huntington designated as “a clash of cultures” of which religion is the centerpiece. They must effectively create a coherent strategy to secure a troubled world from the ravages of religious violence without making a war against religion. They must articulate the objectives and identify the best “ways and means” to provide such security without creating the larger clash.

Clausewitz theorizes war consists of—

....a paradoxical trinity—composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone. The first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people; the second the commander and his army; the third the government. The passions that are to be kindled in war must already be inherent in the people....<sup>6</sup>

Clausewitz’s primordial passion refers to the emotion stirred in the people that arouse their will to wage war. The people’s passions are often subject to pre-existing conditions, so they need only be kindled to lend their support to aggression and violence. Religion is a pervasively fundamental element al Qaeda uses to arouse such passion. It strikes a resounding note within the basic fabric of Muslim culture. Clausewitz argues that passion is a tendency government [or non-state actors] may use to further their political purpose and effect by uniting the people in passion and military action to achieve their policy objectives.<sup>7</sup>

The Clausewitzian trinitarian theory of war explains al Qaeda and associated terrorist networks’ strategy in war making. As a non-state actor al Qaeda draws on a

religious theology to arouse passions, recruit and motivate a military, and define and justify its military and political objectives. U.S. civilian leadership appeals to secular democratic values, religious language, and patriotic themes to achieve the same goals. Al Qaeda's strategic approach and Clausewitzian-like theory of war impacts nation state relationships on an international scale. Religion lies at the heart of their trinity. From a secular perspective, extremists' religious appeals may seem only a smoke screen. However, the enemy has stated that religion (belief: *imam*) is the centerpiece of their effort to mobilize and direct their followers in a jihad against all things modern and Western.<sup>8</sup>

The *religious strategic dimension* is best defined as: the use of religious thoughts, institutions, and peoples to shape, create, and build conditions in order to achieve some strategic objective. Al Qaeda uses the religious strategic dimension to shape strategic thought, create effective terrorist organizations, and build supporting populations of people. This religious strategic dimension can ignite, inspire, inflame, and propel people to fulfilling religious based objectives. Understanding the very essence of al Qaeda's religious motivations and how they use the religious strategic dimension to achieve their political aims is essential to developing a coherent U.S. military strategy for the GWOT.

The struggle for a post-religious, secular-based culture like the United States is getting its intellectual arms around the use of religion to inform policy, define military action, and justify terrorist violence as a rational approach to political objectives. Our civilian and military leaders are thus challenged to grasp in meaningful ways the threat and opportunities without injecting their secular, non-religious bias into the strategic

equation. Even academic social scientists often impose a secular bias that skews the discussion of the role and impact of religion on terrorist extremist ideology. Most secular academics approach the discussion with a dismissive attitude that insists there must be some other “rational” reason for terrorists’ violence. In their secular view, religion cannot account for such violence. Like civilian and military leaders, they cannot accept that for al Qaeda religion guides strategic thought, the way they organize for and conduct operations, and how they relate with populations. Intellectual denial of religious influences can lead to “solutions” that only prolong the real conflict and deepen the resolve of the enemy to pursue their fanatical conclusions.<sup>9</sup>

The consistent need to find explanations other than religious ones for the attacks says, in fact, more about the West than it does about the jihadist. Western scholars have generally failed to take religion seriously. Secularists, whether liberals or socialists, grant true explanatory power to political, social, or economic factors but discount the plain sense of religious statements made by the jihadists themselves. To see why jihadists declared war on the United States and tried to kill as many Americans as possible, we must be willing to listen to their own explanations. To do otherwise is to impose a Western interpretation on the extremists, in effect to listen to ourselves rather than to them.<sup>10</sup>

Current global threats include numerous non-state religious actors. Consequently U.S. military leaders need to consider religion’s role in modern warfare; acknowledge extremists use of religion to strategize, plan and conduct terrorist operations, and arouse the passions of populations for their goals; and develop a strategic capacity to counter religious threats to global security. Non-state actors, such as al Qaeda, will continue to foment their political aims through religion using it to nurture the minds, recruit and motivate the foot soldiers, and exploit the passions of vulnerable people. The United States must develop a strategy that will deny the power of religion to al Qaeda as a strategic capability and deny them justification for religious appeals to violence.

Thus, the military strategist must understand the religious strategic dimension and its use by the enemy in modern warfare.

Bin Laden and al Zawahiri see their terrorist violence as a religiously justifiable way to a righteous end. Religion they believe explains their cause and validates its legitimacy. Religion is the center of gravity for their strategy. Al Qaeda has not changed its message since issuing the *fatwas* in spite of the devastating attacks on their organizational structure since 9/11. The ultimate al Qaeda objective is the eventual reestablishment of a single nation or *umma* governed by the rule of Islam — that is the return of the Caliphate as a theocracy. Former White House Press Secretary, Tony Snow acknowledged this strategic goal: “The history of the Caliphate was that you had centralized leadership at that time. It had control over the impressive landmass that was governed by Muslims during that period. They want to establish that sort of thing so the President’s notion is absolutely right, you want to preempt that.”<sup>11</sup> Snow’s analysis reflects a coherent understanding at the strategic level of the true objective of radical Islam, but shows no strategic understanding of the cultural role of religion in the Muslim world.

The military is attempting to capture and codify part of this in Counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine. The *U.S. Army and Marine Corps COIN Manual* does a reasonable job of identifying some religious aspects, showing their impact on people and culture, and demonstrating how insurgencies use religion to achieve their ends. The manual defines culture as a “web of meaning” shared by members of a particular society or group within a society. According to the COIN Manual culture is:

- A system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that members of a society use to cope with their world and with one another.
- Learned, through a process called enculturation.
- Shared by members of a society; there is no “culture of one.”
- Patterned, meaning that people in a society live and think in ways forming definite, repeating patterns.
- Changeable, through social interactions between people and groups.
- Arbitrary, meaning that Soldiers and Marines should make no assumptions regarding what a society considers right and wrong, good and bad. [Arbitrary means it may defy rational understanding]
- Internalized, in the sense that it is habitual, taken for granted, and perceived as ‘natural’ by people within the society.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, within much of the Islamic world, religion is the natural cultural framework and the religious strategic dimension is pervasive, creating powerful strategic opportunities and consequences. According to prominent political science professor Ernest Evans, terrorists are not amoral sociopaths in their environment. Indeed they have a coherent strategy based on their own moral rationale and religious justifications. He argues they rationalize their violence through religion in five ways:

- Their victims are not innocent people.
- Government is the one really responsible for the violence because it refuses to allow peaceful change.
- There is no alternative to violence because the forces of the status quo are so strong; violence is the only weapon available to those who want change.
- The groups that the terrorists represent [have] suffered greatly, and if others have to suffer, then it is sad but unavoidable.
- Terrorism is a legitimate form of war for oppressed people who have no other means.<sup>13</sup>

Bin Laden and al Zawahiri identified three religious strategic objectives in their *fatwa*: First, eradicate U.S. and western influence from the Middle East; second physically eject the king of Saudi Arabia, who betrayed the community of Islam (*umma*) by sanctioning U.S. military presence in the region; third, destroy Israel and eject

Israelis from Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> Each is founded in a religious justification and supports their overarching objective of an Islamic Theocracy and return of the Caliphate.

Al Qaeda's strategy uses religious concepts "ways" based on diplomatic, informational, military, and economic elements of power to achieve their religious strategic objectives. They used diplomatic approaches in dealing with the Taliban and even offered the United States peace terms. Also, the informational element of power is used in the religious *fatwas* that were designed to fracture the alliance of the United States and its allies, which it regards as a strategic center of gravity, while expanding their religious influence over the Arab Street.<sup>15</sup> In the al Qaeda informational technology arsenal are websites, blogs, video tapes, media, and news outlets in the Middle East and the West artfully used to instill global fear, divide the West, unite Islam, and motivate populations. In addition, al Qaeda uses military power selectively with insurgency tactics, techniques, and procedures to gain strategic impact. Al Qaeda's religious themes and financial remuneration inspired suicide bombings, improvised explosive devices, and limited military attacks, all clearly tied to a religious objective.

Religion is clearly linked with al Qaeda's strategic means. The religiosity of the Muslim people yields: funds drawn from a religious based financial network; an endless stream of religiously motivated foot soldiers; and legitimacy of al Qaeda's actions. Muslims, covertly and overtly committed to al Qaeda's religious objectives, are providing the funds and foot soldiers for al Qaeda's operations. Mosques, madras's, mullahs, criminal elements, and Muslim nation states to include Saudi Arabia, our oil ally, all contribute to the resources of al Qaeda. Both U.S. policy and military strategy fail to grasp the religious dimension of the GWOT.

Radical Islamists portray themselves as the guardians and defenders of true Islam. Thus, their religious beliefs support a theological framework that defines victory as Insha Allah (God willing) —building time and flexibility into their strategy. Furthermore, the eschatological (end times) outcome they advocate represents a fundamentalist Islamic conviction that the final victory over the infidels is near.<sup>16</sup> Hence, it conveys a sense of urgency and finality to their cause. This in turn motivates followers to commit horrific acts on others in a quest for reward in the coming paradise that Allah's true believers will share eternally. The al Qaeda Training Manual declares as a tenant of faith that true Muslims must oppose infidels to live their faith in purity. These true believers are convinced that the institution of Islam will survive only through unity and cooperation of Adam's children and restoration of shiria law.<sup>17</sup> Religion explains and justifies what they must do and what is required to sustain both internal and external support.

### Beginning of Learning

Over the years, the U. S. military establishment embraced stovepipe attempts to address the cultural religious dilemma. For example, the longstanding U.S. Army Foreign Area Officers program was designed to provide officers with a combination of regional expertise, political-military awareness, and language proficiency. Foreign Area Officers provided a cross-cultural linkage with foreign political and military organizations—usually secular in nature. Because few Foreign Area Officers or Defense Attachés are ever deeply immersed in their assigned cultures totally outside the military structure, most do not develop real cultural and social expertise. Furthermore, most do

not work as cultural advisors to commanders on the ground; rather they serve as military attachés, security assistance officers, or instructors.<sup>18</sup>

Early in the GWOT, some senior U.S. Army Chaplains served on the ambassadors' country teams to provide religious counsel in diplomatic relations. For example, the current Army Chief of Chaplains, MG Douglas Carver, served as the V Corps Command Chaplain during Operation Iraqi Freedom I. He then became the Combined and Joint Task Force 7 Command Chaplain when V Corps transitioned to be the CJTF7 in June 2003. As an additional duty, Chaplain Carver worked with Ambassador Paul Bremer on the Coalition Provisional Authority team as the religious advisor. He met Iraqi religious leaders, attended conferences, built cultural bridges, and mended fences with local and regional religious leaders. However, his primary duty to provide religious support to the Corps Commander for all personnel in Iraq limited his capability to serve the Ambassador. Nonetheless this was a laudable and innovative effort. Chaplain Carver indeed seized this opportunity to provide a valuable service. Assigning chaplains to serve as religious diplomats raised many issues in training, personnel, and mission conflicts; but, Chaplain Carver's revolutionary assignment also revealed a ground-breaking strategic role for religious expertise.<sup>19</sup>

Over the past few years, the U.S. Joint Forces Chaplain and respective service counterparts have been reviewing and updating policies and doctrine regarding the chaplain's role in what is called "religious leader engagement." This initiative is designed to enable U.S. military religious leaders to better engage with their counterparts in other cultures. It provides more capable religious leader engagement at the operational and tactical levels. However, it remains to be seen how this is nested to an approach that

comprehensively addresses strategic religious military capabilities. There are many service, functional, organizational, and doctrinal issues yet to be worked through.<sup>20</sup>

On the horizon, the U.S. Army Chaplaincy is also in the process of creating religious advisory positions with Brigade Combat Teams. On the ground experience has demonstrated the need. This is a major step forward, but it does not meet the larger need for religious expertise at the strategic level. Furthermore, building such strategic capacity will require positions of influence not only in the military, but in the interagency and with our world partners. It is critical that any religious initiative have teeth at the strategic level.<sup>21</sup> The military chaplaincy lacks the cultural capacity to deliver strategic “religious expertise” at this level without diminishing their Title 10 requirement to provide religious support for the joint force—it lacks sufficient strategic understanding and resources.

Another developing concept is the Human Terrain System, an attempt to bridge gaps in military cultural awareness. It is designed to assist planning and executing reconstruction operations in post-conflict environments.<sup>22</sup> Human Terrain Systems include the following components:

- Human Terrain Teams are composed of social scientists, military personnel, and cultural analysts, who function as part of a military staff.
- Research Reachback Cell provides analytical and research support to the forward teams.
- Subject Matter Expert Networks are composed of knowledgeable people who provide more in-depth research on request.<sup>23</sup>

The Human Terrain System concept is far from proven and does not focus on the key deficiency—the understanding of the religious strategic dimension.<sup>24</sup> Currently, the Department of Defense has no additional funding to support these programs; therefore resourcing will mean pulling from other programs and quality will likely suffer.<sup>25</sup>

In more recent years, Combatant Commanders embraced ad hoc cultural “anthropological centric” social science advisors to give them needed situational awareness of cultural trends and issues. Many academics serving in this capacity have their own agendas, often do not understand the larger military strategic issues, and lack a strategic perspective of religious cycles of violence and national military strategy. This is not to suggest that they are of no value to the war effort. They can explain the cultural role of religion but not its strategic religious dimensions. In addition, military leaders must understand that these experts are limited by their own discipline’s bias. The anthropological professional society’s official moral and ethical code condemns their participation in combat operations. The academic advisors’ lack of military strategic and operational education and experience, and their biased filters for viewing religious fissures, suggests the need for a comprehensive organic religious strategic analytical capability.<sup>26</sup>

Currently, the U.S. military community is struggling to deal with the religious motivations of a determined enemy in the GWOT. It is now a strategic imperative to accurately comprehend the role of religion in the GWOT. Our failure to identify the insurgency in OIF and our struggle with resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan demonstrates the need to develop a better strategic framework. Inappropriate conclusions about the nature of the war being fought produces solutions that risk defeat, prolong conflict, and often create undesirable second and third order effects at the strategic level. This implies realistic approaches to dealing with the religious strategic dimensions of warfare.

The U.S. military is attempting to capture and codify this in new counterinsurgency doctrine. The *U.S. Army and Marine Corps COIN Manual* endeavors to identify some religious aspects, showing their impact on people and culture and demonstrating how insurgencies use societal bridges to achieve their ends. As noted earlier, the manual defines culture as a “web of meaning” shared by members of a particular society or group within a society. The manual attempts to show the relationship of systems, behaviors, patterns and cultural interactions within society.<sup>27</sup> It wraps the religious strategic dimension in a cocoon of culturalisms, showing the role of religion in a culture but failing to address its religious dimension directly.

Within the military developing a coherent U.S. military strategy to frame the religious strategic dimension seems to be a daunting challenge. This will not be accomplished without some changes in institutional thinking and consequent approaches to the GWOT. Indeed the implications of truly understanding the religious strategic dimension of al Qaeda will radically alter our GWOT strategy. Every element of national power must be integrated into a successful strategy. This requires the cooperative employment of organizations, intellectual capital, and properly focused military strategies. The proper disciplines needed to win the GWOT and future conflicts means investment today in the human capital to build organizational capabilities and strategic capacity for the future.

All too often, both civilian and military strategists tend to view the human condition or circumstances through their own cultural filters without a clear understanding of the roots, interests, and perspectives that others hold. Unfortunately, getting it wrong at this basic level will produce a myriad of undesirable effects on U.S.

national defense policy, strategy, and international relationships. Department of Defense civilian leaders' inability to grasp the religious strategic dimensions early in the GWOT serves to illustrate this point:

Today, we lack metrics to know if we are winning or losing the global war on terror. Are we capturing, killing, or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the *madras*'s and the radical clerics are recruiting, training, and deploying against us? Does the US need to fashion a broad, integrated plan to stop the next generation of terrorists? The US is putting relatively little effort into a long range plan, but we are putting a great deal of effort into trying to stop terrorists. The cost-benefit ratio is against us! Our cost is billions against the terrorists' costs of millions...Is our current situation such that "the harder we work, the behinder we get?"<sup>28</sup>

It would appear that from the onset of the GWOT, troubling signs were appearing on the strategic horizon. The need for a "surge" against an enemy insurgency in Iraq was a glaring indication that our strategic leadership lacked situational awareness and understanding regarding the important role of religion within the region and the al Qaeda network's strategies. While understanding the importance of ideology, leaders showed little understanding of the religious dimension of strategy.

The 2006 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* defines the GWOT as a "...battle of arms and a battle of ideas – a fight against the terrorists and their murderous ideology....In the run, winning the War on Terror means winning the battle of ideas. Ideas can transform the embittered and disillusioned either into murderers willing to kill innocents, or into free peoples living harmoniously in a diverse society."<sup>29</sup> The ideological struggle or "battle of ideas" must focus on the role of religion in our adversaries' strategy. Religion is the cultural basis for explaining and understanding what the strategy portrays as secular issues. For Muslims they are as much religious as secular issues: Al Qaeda provides a religious solution and justification for addressing

these crucial social issues in the Islamic world. It communicates with and motivates Muslims through their religion based culture.

The 2006 *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism* contains six military strategic objectives for the GWOT. The objectives include: denying terrorists resources; empowering partners to join the counter terrorism fight; denying weapons of mass destruction; defeating terrorist organizations; countering state and non-state support with interagency and partner nation support; and countering ideological support for terrorism.<sup>30</sup> Military strategic leaders, fulfilling their role as advisors and shapers of U.S. policy and strategy, must seek to inform civilian military leadership about the cultural role of religion in ideology. The military's *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism* is built on the premise that "...the nature of this war is not a religious or cultural clash between Islam and the West."<sup>31</sup> However, this is not how al Qaeda, terrorists, and many Islamic people see this conflict. If the religious dimension is not addressed then the enemy's center of gravity remains intact.

Current Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recently noted the "ideological" dimensions of the GWOT. He made it clear that victory involved partnership with others to reduce support and counter the ideological messages of al Qaeda. Gates believes combating this message requires a unique capability and capacity that the United States must support.<sup>32</sup> In an attempt to address this requirement, Secretary Gates recently instituted the Minerva Project, which includes provision for religious and ideological studies. This provision in the Minerva Project is built on a bridge of military to academic cooperation in order to deliver the capability to integrate the religious strategic dimension into military strategy.<sup>33</sup>

The beginning of learning reveals some important facts in the pursuit of a coherent U.S. military strategy. In answering the question of what needs to be done, the real challenge and how the United States has failed must be understood. First, the civilian military leadership strategic narrative did not intellectually embrace the notion of the religious strategic dimension in warfare. Second, fueled by secular influences, the military leadership failed to comprehend the enemy's religious center of gravity. Third, military strategic assessments to defeat the enemy lacked a clear strategy to defeat al Qaeda senior leadership's religious center of gravity. Lastly, U. S. military attempts to provide needed religious expertise in the GWOT were limited, compartmented, undermanned, underfunded, and lacked joint service integrative capability.

#### A Proposed Solution

The U.S. military needs an inherent strategic capacity to discern the religious strategic dimension of war so that strategy can properly guide and inform operational and tactical approaches to victory in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Secretary Gates already stated that senior military leaders need a religious stratagem. He further acknowledged there is a gap in requirements and capability for religious expertise that is essential to win the long war.<sup>34</sup> Conventional military attempts at solutions for the religious dimension are not delivering strategic success. The religious strategic dimension of war presents challenges that conventional forces are ill-prepared traditionally to confront. The need to develop capabilities and capacity in this domain is a U.S. military strategic imperative. Such capabilities must have the credibility and means to create a synergy of efforts among the U.S. military, the interagency, and U.S. international partners. The U.S.

strategic need for religious expertise requires a proficiency and aptitude that only SOF can deliver.

In order to be successful, such a capability requires the leadership, responsibility and relationships, right mindset, organizational culture, and educational systems that can inculcate, nurture, and sustain strategic religious capacity and integrate it into the global strategy. Within the military, only United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) is well suited to build the capacity and employ these developed capabilities. It is fully capable of developing religious expertise and building religious teams with capabilities needed to help shape the strategic environment.

SOF strategic leadership already grasps the religious elements of the conflict — its religious strategic dimension. USSOCOM and SOF leadership has a unique global posture, presence, and cultural experience that enable them to clearly grasp the complexities of the religious strategic dimension in war. USSOCOM leadership can translate that knowledge to offer advice on formulating proper U.S. military policy and strategy to align the appropriate “ways and means” to meet the national objectives.<sup>35</sup> Also, SOF leadership grasps the importance of the unconventional, the interagency, the multinational, and the cultural domains of military strategy. USSOCOM Commander, Admiral Eric T. Olson, in recent testimony before Congress emphasized the importance of cultural engagement, along with interagency and multinational cooperation in successful military strategy.<sup>36</sup>

By direction of the Department of Defense, USSOCOM leads, plans, synchronizes, and as directed, executes global operations against terrorist networks in the GWOT.<sup>37</sup> Since USSOCOM has an overarching responsibility for the GWOT, it

ideally postures them to understand and exploit the enemy's religious based center of gravity. Further, the SOF community is uniquely positioned in the military hierarchy and their developed expertise in civil-military relationships is critical to success. SOF understands the complexities of the Washington, D.C. policy and strategic environment. As a functional command, USSOCOM has global reach and responsibilities. It has longstanding relationships with the Regional Combatant Commands, the interagency, and U.S. international partners. USSOCOM is also postured to influence and shape changes in military strategic thinking.<sup>38</sup> The military and interagency mirrors or learns from the SOF community at all levels of war and as a result their performance is enhanced. In turn, when a particular capacity is appropriately developed by SOF it can be transferred to the U.S. conventional forces, the interagency, and U.S. international partners as appropriate when it becomes a standard or "conventional" requirement.<sup>39</sup> As Colonel Joseph D. Celestin (USA, Ret.) correctly postulates:

Since SOF have the characteristics of *integrated* and *unconventional operations*, they can play a strategic role in Unity of Command of U.S., allied, and coalition forces. SOF can integrate the elements of national power with other U.S. government agencies for both unilateral U.S. and coalition operations. And for applications of the military element of national power when the U.S. still prefers discernment, but is willing to participate in multinational or coalition operations, SOF achieves strategic utility as a tool of U.S. foreign policy.<sup>40</sup>

The SOF community has the right cultural mindset to accept unique challenges and tackle special problems. It is in their lineage and charter. The SOF mindset is accepting of and successful at adapting to missions that require "unconventional" roles and development and use of unique capabilities. The SOF truth that "humans are more important than hardware" is a great strength in a struggle for hearts and minds. SOF culture can overcome the Clausewitzian *friction* of a large military bureaucracy and

create the capabilities and capacity to meet the challenge of the religious dimension of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Warfare.<sup>41</sup>

SOF can accomplish this due to three historical and innovative qualities in its people and culture which distinguish it from other military organizations: carefully screened, selected, and trained “elite warriors” with access to strategic enablers and exhibited keen mental faculties; unconventional “creativity” that can overcome strategic friction while delivering needed capabilities and capacity quickly; and a greater “flexibility” to embrace a broader interpretation of military capabilities than conventional forces.<sup>42</sup> These qualities combine to form a culture where innovation and new ways of viewing issues and resolving them are welcomed and supported. When strategic requirements change, SOF historically can adapt and be redirected to rapidly confront new challenges in ways that conventional forces cannot. In part this is also due to SOF’s ability to avoid the strategic friction at institutional and organizational levels to new ideas.<sup>43</sup> The SOF environment of exceptional people, acceptability of unique expertise, creative genius, and flexible organizations argue for a SOF sponsorship of the religious strategic dimension of war.

An example of this innovation occurred in the early days of the GWOT in Afghanistan. SOF personnel partnering with the interagency and indigenous fighters, using local tribal and cultural techniques, achieved strategic impact by forming a most unlikely alliance. Working with indigenous forces, other U.S. agencies, and conventional air forces, SOF played the key role in toppling the Taliban. SOF’s demonstrated effectiveness in quickly forming ad hoc cultural, interagency, and international relationships and innovative strategy and operations on the fly proved exceptional. It is

another reason they are most suited for this challenge of shaping the religious strategic dimension.

USSOCOM has the capability and adaptability to integrate strategic religious expertise into its organizational structure. USSOCOM's flexible manning and training structure is ideally suited to develop the intellectual capital for the future religious strategic dimension of warfare capacity. A conceptual framework for strategic education of SOF personnel already exists. It includes: development of strategic thinking capabilities; supplements service-schools officer professional military education; structures levels of focus from basic strategic thinking to strategist; and emphasizes integration with conventional, interagency, and coalition organizations.<sup>44</sup> It simply needs the added emphasis and focus by USSOCOM for a specific intellectual capability and capacity to deliver religious strategic dimension expertise in support of the nation.

Joint Special Operations University (JSOU), an educational arm of USSOCOM, can provide the appropriate forum and facilities to develop and deliver religious strategic dimension education as part of the profession. JSOU understands the importance of: professionalizing the concept; providing the necessary strategic levels of research and academic expertise; complimenting and augmenting service schools with SOF generated resources; and bridging among the pool of religious, cultural, and military subject matter experts to build the intellectual capacity base. JSOU has the cultural mandate to equip SOF warriors with, "...the intellectual agility to conceptualize creatively useful solutions to ambiguous problems, and produce coherent options."<sup>45</sup> As a result, it is organizationally inclined to embrace the intellectual challenge and find workable solutions. It only requires a mandate and resources.

## Conclusion

Until the United States understands the role of religion in the GWOT, it cannot formulate a successful military strategy. The awakened sleeping giant must build within the SOF community a religious strategic dimension capacity to defeat al Qaeda's religious center of gravity. Such capacity, currently undeveloped in civilian or military strategic leadership, requires a considerable human capital investment in SOF, but the return is an invaluable service to the nation. Only USSOCOM has the requisite leadership, responsibility and relationships, right mindset, history and innovative people, organizational culture, and educational systems to inculcate, nurture, and sustain a strategic religious capacity. Time is not our ally! U.S. military strategy must appropriately address the religious strategic dimension to be successful. SOF is the answer.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Osama bin Laden's "1996 Fatwa," [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa\\_1996.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1996.html) (accessed January 11, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Osama bin Laden's "1998 Fatwa," [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa\\_1998.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1998.html) (accessed February 17, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation "Report on al Qaeda Operations," [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in\\_depth/2780525.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/2780525.stm) (accessed January 11, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> US Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2007* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. State Department, April 2008), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 595-596.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-89.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas M. Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, eds., *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Fox, "Religion as an Overlooked Element of International Relations," *International Studies Review* 3, no. 3 (2001): 54.

<sup>10</sup> Mary R. Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy, Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 9-13.

<sup>11</sup> Tony Snow, "Press Briefing," September 13, 2006, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/09/20060913-3.html> (accessed January 14, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of the Army and U.S. Marine Corps, *Counterinsurgency*, Field Manual No. 3-24/U.S. Marine Corps War Fighting Publication No. 3-33.5 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army and U.S. Marine Corps, December 2006), 3-6,3-7.

<sup>13</sup> Ernest Evans, "The Mind of a Terrorist: How Terrorists See Strategy and Morality," *World Affairs* 167, No.4 (Spring 2005): 175-179.

<sup>14</sup> Osama bin Laden's "1996 Fatwa."

<sup>15</sup> The Madrid bombings, periodic threats to our allies, intimidation, insurgency and the use of irregular warfare as ways to achieve their ends are clear. AQ takes note of history such as the Gulf War to see the importance we place on alliances and coalitions to fight in the Middle East. Their calculations were also based on our responses in Somalia and lack of response to attacks of US interests at home and abroad. They miscalculated the effects of 9/11 and our response, however in a major way.

<sup>16</sup> Evans, "The Mind of a Terrorist: How Terrorists See Strategy and Morality," 179.

<sup>17</sup> Jerrold M. Post, *The Al-Qaeda Training Manual*, (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: USAAF Counterproliferation Center, August 2004), 21-22.

<sup>18</sup> Montgomery McFate, "The Military Utility of Understanding Adversary Cultures," *Joint Force Quarterly* 38 (3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2005): 46.

<sup>19</sup> Chaplain (MG) Douglas Carver interview in Chaplain (COL) Stephen L. Cook, *U.S. Military Chaplains On The Ambassador's Country Team*, Strategy Research Project, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2005). The author spoke with Chaplain Carver as well on numerous occasions about this subject. The US Army chaplaincy wants to branch out in this arena but the implications for expertise, training, and the right application are cause for concern. Chaplain Carver stated to the author in a personal conversation that he believes the right place for this to incubate is the SOF community. He validated that by authorizing USSOCOM two additional chaplain billets, one of which was a Religious Expert with the education, training, and background as a senior chaplain. This is a beginning but the real issue of cultural linkage is still not addressed. Developing the framework to grow this capability will be an investment of time and resources over a person's life cycle as a chaplain. He or she will need exposure to military, civilian, interagency, international, and regional cultural and religious venues to grow this capability. They will need to have a complete understanding of diplomacy, civilian and military cultures, access at senior levels of leadership, global capability and networks for regional contacts to build a network of cultural and religious synergy for national defense strategy.

<sup>20</sup> George Adams, *Chaplains as Liaisons with Religious Leaders: Lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan*, (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, March 2006) 41-44, <http://www.usip.org/pubs/peaceworks/pwks56.pdf>; (accessed February 27, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Interviews and personal interaction with several CJTF-I, MNF-I, MNC-I, and CJTF-A Chaplains who served in Afghanistan from 2001- 08 and Iraq from 2003-08, while the author was deployed ISO GWOT in the special operations forces community. Involvement on the country and occasionally ambassador teams at the operational level was practiced. No forum for strategic input or influence that is formalized for religious impacts existed. Most religious leader engagement and influence was at the tactical level and occasionally at the operational level. No one was providing input to the strategic leadership at the national level in the CT framework or shaping the sustainment of these initiatives in the field, which was often lost in the TOA/RIP.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "Human Terrain Team Preliminary Assessment: Executive Summary" July-August 2007 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2007), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>27</sup> "U.S. Department of the Army and U.S. Marine Corps," *Counterinsurgency*, 3-7.

<sup>28</sup> Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, "16 October 2003 Memo," <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/dod/rumsfeld-d20031016sdmemo.htm> (accessed March 19, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> President George W. Bush, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: White House, September 2006), 7.

<sup>30</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1 February 2006), 6-7.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>32</sup> Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, *National Defense Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: The Pentagon, June 2008), 8-9.

<sup>33</sup> Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, "Association of American Universities Speech", April 14 2008, <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1228> (accessed January 14, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Statement of Admiral Eric T. Olson, U.S. Navy, Commander United States Special Operations Command, before the Senate Armed Services Committee, *On The Posture of Special operations Forces*, March 4, 2008, <http://www.dod.mil/dodgc/olc/docs/testOlson080304.pdf> (accessed March 20, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> United States Special Operations Command, *2006 Posture Statement*, (McDill, Air Force Base, FL: United States Special Operations Command, 2006) <http://www.socom.mil/Docs/2006%20USSOCOM%20Posture%20Statement%20final.pdf>; (accessed February 19, 2009), 3.

<sup>38</sup> Robert G. Spulak, Jr., "A Theory of Special Operations: The Origin, Qualities, and Use of SOF," *JSOU Report* (October 2007), 14-19.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 13, 41.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-19.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-5.

<sup>44</sup> Harry R. Yarger. "Educating for Strategic Thinking in the SOF Community: Considerations and a Proposal," *JSOU Report* (January 2007), 17-26.

<sup>45</sup> Executive Report, "JSOU Second Annual Symposium: Irregular Warfare: Strategic Utility of SOF," *JSOU Report* (April 30 – May 3, 2007), 14.