

A SUN TZU APPROACH TO COUNTER AL-QAEDA'S GLOBAL INSURGENCY

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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by

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ABSTRACT

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Despite the multiple coordinated attacks carried out by Al-Qaeda (AQ) in the United States and at strategic locations abroad, there remain some leaders in government who are incapable of accurately assessing the strategic nature of this terrorist organization. As a nation we have devoted a tremendous amount of our country's strategic resources to analyzing AQ tactical operations. We have not however, rigorously examined AQ using established theoretical frameworks on war. This paper will attempt to examine AQ's operations through the tenets of Sun Tzu's theory of war, known as *The Art of War*. The primary purpose is to give the reader a better understanding of the relevant strategic operational methods employed by AQ, by briefly analyzing its past methods and operations against Sun Tzu's conceptual framework. The essay concludes with some initial recommendations on how the United States can restructure our current civilian-military doctrine using an "Art of War" analytical framework to gradually curtail AQ operations.

A SUN TZU APPROACH TO COUNTER AL-QAEDA'S GLOBAL INSURGENCY

Despite the multiple coordinated attacks carried out by Al-Qaeda (AQ) in the United States and at strategic locations abroad, there remain some leaders in government who are incapable of accurately assessing the strategic nature of this terrorist organization. As a nation we have devoted a tremendous amount of our country's strategic resources to analyzing AQ tactical operations. We have not however, rigorously examined AQ using established theoretical frameworks on war. This paper will attempt to examine AQ's operations through the tenets of Sun Tzu's theory of war, known as *The Art of War*. The primary purpose is to give the reader a better understanding of the relevant strategic operational methods employed by AQ, by briefly analyzing its past methods and operations against Sun Tzu's conceptual framework. The essay concludes with some initial recommendations on how the U.S. can restructure our current civilian-military doctrine using an "Art of War" analytical framework to gradually curtail AQ operations.

The U.S. and our allies have expended much blood and treasure in an effort to destroy and disrupt the global jihadist backbone of AQ throughout the world, with limited success. We have relied primarily on tactical operations designed to deny AQ and their facilitators safe haven, and/or by killing/capturing known AQ leaders. By most measures our efforts to disrupt and destroy AQ using these tactics have had mixed results, and could arguably be seen as counterproductive to our intent. Until we understand and appreciate AQ's theory of war, and recognize that they are a sophisticated and formidable non-state enemy, we will continue to struggle in our efforts to marginalize their effectiveness.

While support in Islamic countries for AQ's leader, Osama bin Laden, has declined during the eight years subsequent to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the *Pew Global Attitudes Project* notes that such support for bin Laden remains a significant trend in numerous Muslim countries.¹ AQ demonstrated that it retains substantial, though diminished, support throughout the Muslim world. AQ's continued popularity in the Islamic world, combined with its sophisticated strategic and tactical organization/operations has demonstrated that it is worthy of further examination using well established war theory precepts, normally reserved for conventional state actors. Of the recognized theories of war studied by modern military establishments, AQ's strategic and tactical operations closely parallels the teachings of Sun Tzu.

AQ and Sun Tzu's Art of War

Surprisingly there has not been an extensive body of academic examination of AQ's organization/operations from a Sun Tzu perspective. Caleb Bartley provided the most comprehensive analysis to date with his 2005 article entitled *The Art or Terrorism: What Sun Tzu Can Teach Us about International Terrorism*.² In this work, Bartley compellingly outlines relevant similarities between AQ's "art of terrorism" and the principles of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*. He compares and contrasts Sun Tzu's tactical advice in *The Art of War* with AQ's tactics and training regimens in order to identify parallels. Bartley's analysis was carried out with an eye toward developing new strategies that the U.S. and our allies could use in dealing with AQ. This essay will expand on Bartley's AQ/Sun Tzu analysis focusing primarily on the synchronization of AQ's tactical and strategic operations, to determine why they have been so effective in attracting new recruits and in countering the strategic efforts of the U.S. and our international partners.

The Art of War

Approximately 2500 years ago, a Chinese General named Sun Tzu began what may have been the first written attempt at understanding the theory of war and establishing basic principles concerning the conduct of war in a concise thirteen chapter text. His work has been passed along throughout the ages, to include a 1963 translation and introduction by Samuel B. Griffith.³ Despite the ancient era in which this work was initially conceived by Sun Tzu, and the four decades that have passed since the work was translated by Griffith, the precepts have remarkable relevancy to our current long war against AQ. For the sake of analytical organization and clarity, each of the examined themes will be keyed to, and led by the relevant chapters of Sun Tzu's work. The chapters and titles of Sun Tzu's Art of War are as follows: 1. Estimates; 2. Waging War; 3. Offensive Strategy; 4. Dispositions; 5. Energy; 6. Weakness and Strengths; 7. Maneuver; 8. The Nine Variables; 9. Marches; 10. Terrain; 11. The Nine Varieties of Ground; 12. Attack by Fire; 13. Employment of Secret Agents.

A review of AQ operations since the late 1980's reveals relevancy in nearly all thirteen chapters of Sun Tzu's work. The analysis below will focus primarily on the synchronization of AQ's tactical and influence operations as they relate to Sun Tzu's theories.

Estimates.

War is a matter of vital importance to the state...appraise it in terms of the five fundamental factors...so you may assess its essentials...*the first of these factors is moral influence...*By Moral influence I mean that which causes the people to be in harmony with their leaders, so they will accompany them in life and unto death without fear of mortal peril.⁴

In terms of moral influence, AQ's chief, Osama bin Laden continues to hold a commanding moral presence among jihadist followers throughout the world. Bin

Laden's personality and character traits are an exceptionally good fit with those of Islamic heroes of the past.⁵ Bernard Lewis notes that because of bin Laden's stature as a near mythic Islamic hero, he remains an enormously popular figure, not only with extremists and radicals, but within much wider circles in the Arabic world.⁶ Lewis further notes that bin Laden follows the historic Islamic model of the well spoken, austere, brave, and self-effacing hero. Beyond rhetoric lies the personal example set by bin Laden over the course of his life and insurgent career, which currently spans over a quarter of a century of jihadist activism.⁷

Sociologist Max Weber noted that charismatic leaders have been born in times of political, religious, physical and ethical crisis. They are natural leaders that possess specific gifts of the mind, body and spirit; these gifts are believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody.⁸ Osama bin Laden's behavior and activities closely parallels Weber's conceptualization of the charismatic leader in terms of his religious and spiritual piety, his prophetic vision of the future umma, and the perceived violent, sectarian times in which he is serving as AQ's leader. As previously noted the September 2009 *Pew Global Attitudes Project* found that while support for Osama bin Laden declined after 9/11, he nevertheless remains of significant importance in many Muslim countries.

The followers of Osama bin Laden have demonstrated their willingness to accompany him unto death without fear of mortal peril. If Osama bin Laden's overall public approval ratings have decreased somewhat throughout the Islamic world, his popularity among jihadist fighters has offset those ratings, as evidenced by an increase in suicide bombers. There was not a single suicide attack during the ten-year-long

Afghan war against the Soviets. One of the first AQ suicide attacks was two days before 9/11, when the popular anti-Taliban leader Ahmed Shah Masoud was assassinated by two AQ suicide bombers. There were hardly any further bombings in Afghanistan until 2004 when the resurgent Taliban mounted six suicide attacks against US and Afghan forces. Then there was a significant uptick of suicide attacks in the country: 21 in 2005, 136 in 2006, and 137 in 2007. The presence of bin Laden, who is reported to be on the Pakistani side of the border, acts as the inspiration of the jihadist foot soldiers, facilitators and the suicide bombers.⁹

The Western World rightly views Osama bin Laden as a terrorist scoundrel who is responsible for taking the lives of thousands of innocents throughout the world in the name of religious ideology. Within the Islamic world, however, he is no doubt one of the most charismatic leaders in recent history. One can find his recorded spiritual messages and the likeness of his image at kiosks in most Islamic cities in the world, along with an abundance of crude jihadist documentaries, literature and keep-sakes. His recorded messages to the Islamic community are for the most part timely, carefully scripted, and designed to attract widespread support and influence in the West and the Islamic world.

Estimates.

Anger his General and confuse him. If the enemy General is obstinate and prone to anger, insult him and enrage him, so he will be irritated and confused, and without a plan will recklessly advance against you.¹⁰
Pretend inferiority and encourage his arrogance.¹¹

Following the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. was eager to hold the perpetrators of the atrocities accountable. Since the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993, AQ had become more sophisticated in its operational activities and had developed an increased

operational tempo and media campaign. Throughout the 1990s the organization successfully launched attacks throughout the world to include Mogadishu in 1993, Riyadh in 1995, Dhahran in 1996, Nairobi and Dar es Salam in 1998, and Aden in 2000. In 2001, Osama bin Laden was based in Afghanistan and had been there since 1996, with the protection and support of the Taliban.¹² When the 2001 Pentagon and World Trade Center attacks took place it was evident that AQ was culpable and deserved swift and certain justice in its safe haven in Afghanistan. In the hours and days that followed the 9/11 attacks the intelligence community built the case against AQ in Afghanistan, while the President's inner-circle focused immediately on making the connection to Iraq, though there was none.¹³ As Bob Woodward noted in his book *Plan of Attack*, on the afternoon of September 11, 2001 the Secretary of Defense brought up with his aides the possibility of striking Afghanistan and Iraq simultaneously, and the next day he asked in a White House meeting if the attacks offered an opportunity to move against Iraq. He told the President that it was important that pressure was exerted against state actors such as Iraq, in addition to AQ. The President subsequently agreed.¹⁴

The ongoing combat operations were initiated in Afghanistan in October 2001 and in Iraq on March 2003. While there have been limited successes, it has been a tough slog in both countries since. One could argue that the decision making process exhibited by our leaders was fraught with character defects discussed in Sun Tzu's theory of War, which were magnified by the perceived enormity of the crisis. The Secretary of Defense and other key leaders in the Administration had a tendency to exhibit anger, irritation and an overall obstinate management style and worldview that may have set in motion a series of unfortunate events, drawing our nation into a war

that was not carefully thought through. In his book, *Imperial Hubris*, Michael Scheuer aptly titled the chapter on how we were drawn into the post 9/11 conflict as “*When the Enemy Sets the Stage: How America’s Stubborn Obtuseness Aids Its Foes*”. He noted that “the invasion and occupation of Iraq was Osama bin Laden’s gift from America, one he had long desired, but never realistically expected.” Iraq without Saddam Hussein and the totalitarian Baath Party would quickly become a “failed state”, where AQ operations would flourish, similar to Afghanistan.¹⁵ While AQ operations are generally well planned and calculated in advance, it is unlikely that they had the capability and intent to purposefully lay a trap that drew the U.S. into battle in Iraq and Afghanistan. This said, they pushed, prodded and angered the U.S., to the point where an invasion of Iraq made sense to the Administration, and the American people, and was considered the best option to deny and disrupt AQ. The gravity of the 9/11 attacks, combined with the blunt and stubborn temperament of some senior Administration officials gave rise to an outcome that closely resembled Sun Tzu’s theories on how one should exploit the enemies character and leadership style to goad them into battle.

Estimates.

When he is united, divide him. Sometimes drive a wedge between a sovereign and his ministers; on other occasions separate his allies from him. Make them mutually suspicious so they drift apart. Then you can plot against them.¹⁶

AQ’s effective insertion into the internal political affairs of the U.S. and its allies is widespread and has been for the past 12-15 years. AQ conducts influence operations using kinetic strikes, kidnappings, and assassinations. They also disseminate sophisticated video/digital/voice recordings, press releases, and jihadist motivational/training recordings that are aimed at a wide range of audiences, friend and

foe alike. The media messages are often timed to coincide with a special event so as to have the most significant impact. AQ's influence operations have been enhanced as a result of increased electronic communication, and the increased operational experience that AQ's strategic leadership and foot soldiers have acquired on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan, and on the streets of the U.S. and allied third countries. There is no doubt that the goals of AQ operations have been directed at driving a wedge between the U.S. and our foreign allies, and shaping internal politics in the U.S. and among our allied nation states. The aggregate level of AQ operational activity is synchronized, steady, sophisticated and effective.

AQ routinely uses disinformation as part of its influence efforts to throw the allied forces off balance. In January 2008 the BBC reported that AQ operatives in Pakistan planned to stage a number of suicide attacks that it would blame on several banned militant outfits, including Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Harkat-ul-Jihad Islami, Azad Kashmir and Multan and Jaish-i-Mohammad. AQ's sole purpose in planning the attacks was to take the intelligence/law enforcement community focus off AQ affiliated cells like Lashkar-i-Jhangvi and the Pakistani Taliban's now deceased leader Baitullah Mehsud, who was accused of masterminding the assassination of the former Pakistani premier Benazir Bhutto.¹⁷ This denial and deception operation was a classic example of the creativity and the risk that AQ uses in carrying out its influence operations.

Shortly after the start of the war in Afghanistan AQ launched a campaign to kidnap and execute selected targets of opportunity which were designed to amplify AQ's strength, reach and capabilities, and instill fear on the home front. Most notable was Daniel Pearl, a reporter for the Wall Street Journal who went to Pakistan in January

2002 to reportedly examine a connection between "shoe bomber" Richard Reid and Pakistani militants. Daniel Pearl was subsequently tortured, photographed, and beheaded. AQ carried out similar activities in Iraq, taking advantage of the deteriorating situation as the country slid toward its inevitable failed state status. On July 7, 2005, as London was being terrorized by an AQ bombing wave, an Islamist website released a recording showing an Egyptian diplomat, blindfolded and handcuffed. In an accompanying statement the "Al-Qaeda Organization for Jihad in the Land of the Two Rivers" denounced the diplomat, Ihab al-Sharif, as an "enemy of God" and declared that its holy warriors had killed him. It warned other Arab and Muslim countries that if they stationed diplomats in Baghdad, they would suffer the same fate. ¹⁸

The purpose of such brutal kidnapping operations is to sow fear and anger into the American people and its allies, and plant the seed that there would be retribution against the West for their invasion of Islamic lands. It should be noted that AQ purposefully ceased such brutal kidnappings and accompanying media releases when opinion polls in the Islamic world indicated opposition to these brutal actions. This further demonstrates AQ's measured sophistication and purposeful action in carrying out what they consider to be effective influence operations. ¹⁹

One of AQ's most effective influence operations was carried out in Madrid, Spain on March 11, 2004. The AQ terrorist attack on the Madrid metro rail system was the first major attack on Spanish soil in recent history. Islamic extremists detonated 10 improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on four trains causing 191 casualties and over 1,400 injuries. The attack may have had an indirect impact on internal politics in Spain to include the subsequent withdrawal of Spanish troops from the "coalition of the

willing.” The impact was felt by democratic nations throughout the world, and prompted the allies taking part in combat operations in support of the U.S. to reconsider their participation. In 2007 a letter signed by Osama bin Laden surfaced, directing the Algerian Salafi Group to target the southern and eastern parts of France, as part of their plans to repeat the “Spanish scenario” during the French presidential elections.²⁰ In October 2007 there were concerns in Poland, following the attempted assassination of their ambassador in Iraq, that they would also suffer an internal attack and they should begin withdrawing troops from Iraq.²¹ By 2009 there were fears expressed by German law enforcement and intelligence agencies that they may experience a similar fate leading up to their elections.²² It is clear that AQ’s Influence operations in the form of synchronized kinetic strikes and media releases had stirred fear among the U.S. and its allies. The net effect of these operations drove a wedge in the already fragile “coalition of the willing”, chipping away at its unity. A June and July 2008 Pew Survey noted that support for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan declined worldwide. More troublesome, in the vast majority of countries surveyed, support for the war on terror dropped significantly since 2002. There were decreases of at least 25 percent in France, Britain, Poland, Germany and Italy. Support for the US-led war remains at or above 50 per cent in very few countries, while the level of support in some key countries - Canada 37 percent, Britain 38 percent, Turkey 9 per cent, Pakistan 13 percent, Indonesia 32 percent, China 26 percent, Japan 40 percent, and India 49 percent – could be symptomatic of a widely-perceived sense of failure.²³

Other AQ media operations of note included an attempt to disrupt then incoming President Obama’s support within the African American community. In late November

2008 AQ's deputy leader accused then President elect Barack Obama of betraying his race and his father's Muslim heritage and urged more attacks, as the group tried to counter the incoming U.S. President's global popularity. Osama bin Laden's second-in-command Ayman al Zawahri attacked Obama as a "house negro," a racially-charged term used by 1960s black American Muslim leader Malcolm X to describe black slaves loyal to white masters.²⁴

Based upon the above Art of War analysis, it has been demonstrated that AQ has fully exploited every opportunity to effectively influence the West and the global Islamic community. Sometimes their influence is violent in the form of kidnappings, torture and murder, and at other times the influence is more benign such as targeted press releases. Regardless of their methods, it appears that AQ understands the Western world far better than we understand the Islamic world, and as a result they are extremely capable at packaging their message to effectively reach their target audience, and ultimately their end state.

A Sun Tzu Shift in Policy to Confront Islamic Extremism

At present the West's collective strategy to deal with AQ is not achieving our primary objective to deny and disrupt AQ and their supporters who facilitate terrorist operations throughout the world. Moreover, we are barely making a measurable impact on the citizens of the Islamic world who are otherwise opposed to AQ. Based upon the above cited opinion polls, citizens of the West have also expressed their lack of support for U.S. counterterrorism operations. The world is facing a global insurgency by AQ that uses terror as a tactic and the media to highlight the negative impact of combat operations conducted by the U.S. and our allies. The primary means by which AQ exploits our operational and foreign policy decisions is through a sophisticated use of

technology and the media. AQ is seizing every opportunity to highlight inconsistencies in our foreign policy. They can easily point out that the quality of life of the average Afghan or Iraqi citizen has not improved since U.S. combat operations began.

Sun Tzu said war is the most important concern of the state and must be thoroughly studied.²⁵ As Samuel Griffith noted, implied in this comment is recognition that war is not a transitory aberration but a recurrent, conscious act that is susceptible to rational analysis. The U.S. and its allies have had difficulty conducting effective rational analysis on AQ, and have not fully appreciated many of the grievances raised by moderate Muslims. In order to develop an effective foreign policy approach that will succeed in achieving our goals, we need to have an adequate understanding of the enemy we face. If we continue to fight the long war by conducting kill/capture operations against AQ without a comprehensive global counterinsurgency strategy, to include coordinated, robust public diplomacy, we will face further defeat in the form of continued hate and discontent within the Islamic world, death to our citizens and allies, and the slow destruction our way of life.

Improving our current dilemma will require a fundamental change in how we view AQ and how future wars are fought. We need to acknowledge that AQ is essentially a global insurgency that is exploiting inequalities that many in the global Muslim community are experiencing on a daily basis. We need to focus our efforts on an effective “irregular warfare” strategy that provides vulnerable communities throughout the world with the benefits of indirect soft power. At present, no single U.S. agency or entity is responsible for coordinating and implementing an effective global irregular warfare and public diplomacy strategy.

One of the basic tenets of effective counterinsurgency is unity of command, force and effort. We need to explore the creation of a permanent department or agency within the federal government whose participants are diverse in their skills and abilities, well versed and committed to public diplomacy, development, humanitarian assistance, media influence operations, and when necessary targeted strikes throughout the world. Without such a robust restructuring of our national instruments of power, the U.S. and our allies will continue to crawl and grope our way to certain failure.

A National Strategy to Eliminate the Threat

For the purposes of developing a successful national strategy to marginalize AQ as our most pressing threat, we need to visualize a plan of action through a lens other than the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. While these conflicts are critical to our national security posture, they have become so complex that they will require a separate plan of action and a separate analytical framework. It is fair to say that the lack of significant progress in Iraq and Afghanistan has helped the U.S. government overcome its institutional aversion to irregular warfare. The conflicts have also developed our understanding of the importance of stabilizing failed or failing states, and otherwise ungoverned spaces where AQ can plan and coordinate for future transnational insurgency operations. In an effort to remain intellectually consistent, the below recommendations will also be examined against the backdrop of Sun Tzu's teachings that were outlined in *The Art of War*.

An Eastern Strategy Against the Asymmetric Threat

Since 9/11 and the subsequent interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. has returned to a belief in irregular warfare as a viable way forward against state and nonstate, asymmetric enemies such as AQ. The concept of a larger nation state

utilizing irregular warfare to counteract the capabilities of a smaller, more nimble, nonstate enemy with carefully planned irregular tactics is in keeping with the offensive strategies espoused Sun Tzu.

Offensive Strategy.

...To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill...Thus, what is of supreme importance is to attack the enemy's strategy...disrupt his alliances...attack his army...²⁶

The U.S. military's use of irregular warfare as a means to deny and disrupt state and nonstate enemies is by no means a new doctrine. It was however, periodically dormant over the years with the exception of limited activities carried out by elements within the special operations community. The most recent success of our limited counterinsurgency efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrated that irregular tactics can be designed and implemented as an effective strategy to degrade nonstate insurgents to include AQ operatives and their would be facilitators throughout the world.

Irregular warfare describes a range of strategic and tactical operations that are considered political, economic, social, and military in nature. The goal of such operations is to divide the enemy's power base and ameliorate the conditions or grievances that give rise to insurgencies.²⁷ Irregular warfare is thought to be less intense and more diverse than classical large scale warfare, and is considered an indirect approach to warfare that focuses on the control or influence of populations, not on the control of an adversary's forces or territory. The aim is to marginalize and undermine the adversary's legitimacy and credibility and to isolate them from the population that supports and facilitates their operations. If there is a semblance of government in the adversary's territory or state, then the goal would be to further legitimize that government.²⁸ If no government exists, in a failed state or region for

example, the goal would be to win favor with an alternate power base in the region such as a tribe, clan, or some other form of quasi-governmental entity that enforces social norms of control over a population.

Irregular warfare is essentially a political struggle with both non-violent and violent components. Examples of irregular operations include insurgency and counterinsurgency; terrorism and counterterrorism; foreign internal defense; stability, security, transition, and reconstruction operations; transnational criminal activities that support or sustain irregular warfare and the law enforcement activities to counter them; civil-military operations; unconventional warfare; psychological operations; information operations; and intelligence and counterintelligence operations.²⁹ While irregular warfare has a direct tactical component that is aggressive and violent, the goal is to “win the hearts and minds” of the enemy, with as little direct confrontation as possible, thus achieving more with less force.

Effective irregular warfare requires subduing the enemy with as little force as possible, attacking his strategy, dividing and disrupting his alliances, and by conducting carefully timed and coordinated tactical and influence operations. The indirect nature of irregular warfare is in keeping with the Eastern way of warfare that stems from the teachings of Sun Tzu.³⁰ It is different from the often blunt, Western way of warfare which is characterized by heavy firepower and heavy defensive armaments, the inability to retreat, and the goal of absolute destruction of the enemy's forces in the field of battle.³¹

Institutionalizing the Doctrine of Irregular Warfare

Estimates.

War is a matter of vital importance to the state...appraise it in terms of the five fundamental factors...so you may assess its essentials...the fifth of these factors is doctrine...By doctrine I mean organization....control.³²

The U.S. has made tremendous progress to institutionalize irregular warfare as an essential element of its future military doctrine. In January 2004, the National Defense University published “Transforming for Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations”, which identified a post-conflict stability and reconstruction gap that was counterproductive to achieving stability. In 2005, the Department of Defense (DOD) published Directive 3000.5, “Military Support for Stability, Security Transition Operations,” and declared that stability operations were a core U.S. military mission to be accorded priority comparable with that of combat operations. Shortly thereafter, U.S. Army occupational specialties were shifted to this new core mission by the tens of thousands.³³ The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Report (2006 QDR) noted that the future of irregular warfare against the global insurgency extends far beyond the borders of Iraq and Afghanistan. The language in the 2006 QDR and the accompanying documents memorialized that DOD leadership is committed to irregular warfare as a significant doctrine well into the future. This doctrinal shift to irregular warfare is a drastic departure from what Russell Weigley referred to as “the American Way of Warfare”: that is the mobilization of all resources to annihilate the enemy, with little concern for what happens after the conflict.³⁴

While it appears that the post 9/11 DOD has embraced a doctrinal approach to irregular warfare, this does not mean it will be accepted as a long term military doctrine. History has been here before, and this is the third major attempt by the U.S. military to adopt irregular warfare within the past 100 years. In 1921 the Marine Corps developed an intra-service Small Wars Doctrine, derived from the experiences of their troops who

participated in the Caribbean Banana Wars. This internal doctrine led to extensive small wars training for the Marine Corps. In 1935 the Marine Corps published its first *Small Wars Manual*, which was revised and reissued in 1940.³⁵ The manual was 428 pages in length and detailed how to balance diplomacy with combat operations, stability operations, foreign internal defense, and humanitarian operations. For this reason the *Manual* noted that Marines were sometimes referred to, and considered themselves as “State Department troops.”³⁶ The *Small Wars Manual* was insightful, and was the precursor for many of the methods and tactics that were used in forming contemporary irregular warfare doctrine.

In 1962 President Kennedy expressed his support for irregular warfare as a means to beat back the Communist insurgents of the day. His Administration made significant organizational change within his cabinet in an effort to overcome the potential for institutional resistance. Such changes included National Security Memo 124, which expanded counterinsurgency operations and assigned a cabinet-level body, “the Special Group,” to be responsible for coordinating irregular operations. Despite these organizational changes that promoted the stature of irregular warfare, the changes were given little consideration in a military establishment that was dominated by a view that Vietnam was essentially a conventional war.³⁷ It was not until 1967, after years of difficulty attaining security, that President Johnson initiated a somewhat coherent counterinsurgency program in Vietnam, in the form of the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program.³⁸ While CORDS made a marked improvement in stabilizing the conflict, it was seen as too little, too late, as the war came to a bitter conclusion in 1975.

While the U.S. participated in a number of irregular conflicts throughout the 1980-90s, it failed to shift from the big war conventional doctrine. The 1990s stabilization operations in Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia, Northern Iraq, East Timor, and Kosovo did, however, highlight the need for greater civilian-military cooperation in irregular operational environments. President Clinton issued a series of Presidential Decision Directives (PDDs 25, 56, 71) aimed at improving the U.S. government's capabilities to respond in complex civilian-military operating environments. PDD 56 established an interagency framework for coordinating the post conflict response, but was considered weak, as it failed to provide clearly defined interagency integration and leadership, and gathered little support within the civilian and military establishments.³⁹

The events of 9/11, and the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, demonstrated that instability throughout the world can be a potent threat to the American people and our national interests. In this context winning battles becomes less significant than stabilizing populations and establishing effective governance.⁴⁰ In 2006 the U.S. Army/Marine Corps issued FM 3-24, known as the *Counterinsurgency Handbook*.⁴¹ The handbook was an innovative restatement of U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine, and incorporated several years of lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan.

During the past 100 years the U.S. military has resisted adopting irregular warfare as a long-term doctrinal approach and our historical efforts to transform our organizational irregular warfighting capabilities has been characterized as a litany of failure.⁴² While it appears that the U.S. has adopted irregular warfare to counter the present transnational terrorist threats, there is already a movement inside and outside the Pentagon regarding the lack of preparedness for high-end, traditional military

conflict.⁴³ Combined with the frustrations associated with irregular warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan, there may be a gradual push back to the conventional warfare status quo. In order to ensure that the *2006 Counterinsurgency Field Manual* does not fall by the wayside, as did the *1940 Marine Corps Small Wars Manual*, there needs to be dramatic organizational change within the U.S. military and U.S. interagency establishment.

As Sun Tzu noted, doctrine, organization, and control are vital elements of successful warfighting, and generals who did not master these virtues would be defeated.⁴⁴ Without decisive organizational/doctrinal change, the U.S. military may tire of irregular warfare and revert to large scale, high intensity war reflecting the conflicts that we historically have prepared to fight, thus further losing our way in the long war against the transnational terrorist threat.

Irregular Warfare and Interagency Integration

Energy.

...In battle there are only normal forces and the extraordinary forces, but their combinations are limitless; none can comprehend them all...For these two forces are mutually reproductive; their interaction as endless as that of interlocked rings. Who can determine where one begins and the other ends...⁴⁵

Implicit in Sun Tzu's guidance is a call for joining all elements of national power to create a strong unified front against our adversaries. It has long been held that effective irregular warfare requires unity of effort⁴⁶, and best practices since the early 1960s, have demonstrated that close collaboration between the U.S. military and the entire U.S. civilian community can produce optimal results.⁴⁷ Despite the renewed interest in irregular warfare as an effective tool to combat the global insurgency, and the acknowledgement that the civilian-military interagency approach is necessary in

effectively carrying out irregular warfare, the U.S. government has achieved little traction in institutionalizing a permanent interagency approach to conduct such warfare. While recognized as necessary, the whole of the government's approach can currently be described as temporary, disjointed, and ad hoc. This inability to fully integrate and leverage civilian-military interagency cooperation fails to strategically exploit all the elements of our national power against our enemies, who thrive in the realm of irregular conflict.

Because irregular warfare is tied to issues affected by economic, political, diplomatic, military, and ideological considerations, there must be seamless integration between the various U.S. government civilian authorities and the U.S. military. Such civilian-military integration is necessary to strategically develop, fund, synchronize and implement effective irregular operations. Thus far such integration has been absent, or woefully inadequate. Irregular warfare efforts use the loose construct of "unity of effort" rather than the structure of "unity of command," which is a fundamental principle of warfare.⁴⁸

In order to realize the guidance of Sun Tzu, creating a joint force whose "interactions are as endless as that of interlocked rings" we need a fully integrated civilian-military command structure that focuses on irregular warfare as a strategic and tactical solution to the transnational insurgent threat that is posed by AQ.

Following the tragedy of 9/11 the inability of the U.S. intelligence and law enforcement communities to work together as a unified front was identified as a key reason why government failed to prevent the 9/11 attacks. The 9/11 commission noted that synchronizing all of the instruments of national power against the global insurgency

was of extreme importance, but would be difficult to achieve with the myriad of agencies who had independent interests, and routinely “stove-piped” critical information.⁴⁹ The 9/11 commission further noted that because coping with terrorism was not the sole province of any component of the U.S. government, a coordinating mechanism was necessary.⁵⁰

In August 2004 President Bush issued Executive Order (EO) 13354 which established the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), to serve as the primary organization in the U.S. government for analyzing and integrating all intelligence pertaining to terrorism and counterterrorism; to conduct strategic operational planning for counterterrorism activities, integrating all instruments of national power, including diplomatic, financial, military, intelligence, homeland security, and law enforcement activities within and among agencies; to assign operational responsibilities to lead agencies for counterterrorism activities that are consistent with applicable law and that support strategic plans to counter terrorism.⁵¹ The Intelligence Reform and Terrorist Prevention Act of 2004 of December, 2004, Public Law (PL) 108-458, created the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) and the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) as a subordinate organization. The combined effect of PL 108-458 and EO 13354 created a singular government leader, and a single government institution to coordinate, integrate, and synchronize “whole of government” counterterrorism operations.

One could argue the failings of the U.S. to effectively conduct irregular operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Vietnam, and the numerous irregular conflicts throughout our history has been a grave and persistent failure of civilian-military coordination. Because these failings have taken place over a period of generations, however, national leaders

have failed to recognize the true impact of the problem, and the need for dramatic change in the functioning of the interagency when it comes to irregular warfare and other complex operations. Irregular warfare in the 21st Century has direct implications to transnational terrorist organizations such as AQ, which exploit failed states to plan and coordinate operations that threaten our national fabric, and the global commons. As such, the possible outcome of not dramatically restructuring our national security apparatus responsible for irregular warfare is critical.

The civilian-military disunity in irregular warfare operations has been documented as a problem that needs restructuring. Martin Gorman and Alexander Krongard stated, “when the Government confronts conflated or melded problems that are beyond the capacity of any single department or agency to solve, it rarely develops comprehensive policies; instead it poorly coordinates actions, badly integrates strategies, and fails to synchronize policy implementation.”⁵²

Lew Irwin noted that the U.S. government has consistently failed to apply the full weight of its instruments of power during irregular warfare largely because the military and the various agencies cannot agree upon the ends, ways and means to prosecute those wars. While Irwin recognized the need for an interagency mechanism to coordinate irregular warfare, he dismissed the creation of another government bureaucracy, or the restructuring the National Security Council to exercise centralized planning and oversight over irregular warfare as ineffective.⁵³ Irwin instead calls for the integration of interagency personnel, involved in carrying out complex operations, throughout the current military combatant command structure.

One of the most salient observations noted by Irwin was to provide the irregular warfare units in the field clear strategic-level statements of intent, resources, and the responsibility and the authority to make decisions without centralized approval.⁵⁴ While there needs to be a centralized command structure to synchronize operations and to articulate the overall diplomatic narrative, it is up to the civilian-military units in the field to determine how that narrative can be best implemented into operations at the local level. This decentralized authority is necessary to ensure that irregular warfare stays irregular. It also ensures that direct and indirect irregular warfare operations are carried out in the most expeditious manner based on dynamic conditions on the ground.

A second model, proposed by Hans Binnendijk and Patrick Cronin, recognized the need for centralized interagency coordination in terms of irregular warfare, but recommended a strong, empowered, cross functional interagency team that reports to the National Security Council.⁵⁵ A third option is an approach similar to the “NCTC model” described above. The NCTC model strengthens the singular command and control of numerous independent agencies into one independent entity reporting to the President, yet it does not include the bureaucratic bulk and inefficiency of a DHS-like entity. The NCTC model is more in line with the Binnendijk/Cronin Model, but could incorporate many of the recommendations proposed by Irwin, particularly those ensuring that the central command element coordinating the operations does not become overly involved in the approval and implementation of the irregular warfare operations in the field. Failing to give operational deference to the units on the ground would negatively impact the operational tempo and creativity necessary to successfully prosecute an irregular warfare campaign.

A variant of the NCTC model would be to designate the DNI and the existing NCTC as the primary focal point for all irregular warfare that has a counterterrorism nexus. This would save time and resources as the NCTC has spent the past several years developing best practices as they relate to the civilian-military counterterrorism operations. While there remain significant deficiencies at the NCTC, they have established, and are currently working to improve and streamline, the interagency organizational backbone, joint operational planning procedures, joint communication networks, and fluid information sharing among the civilian-military partners. Using the NCTC as the irregular warfare focal point is a logical expansion of their role as the lead coordinating body in global counterterrorism operations.

Regardless of the civilian-military entity created, there is overwhelming agreement that such permanent integration is sorely needed, and will likely come about only with a strong legislative mandate. If the U.S. government continues to view complex operations as an insignificant, passing problem, deserving only of a temporary, ad hoc coordination approach, we will never achieve Sun Tzu's concept of limitless strength of forces.

Conclusion

The teachings of Sun Tzu are as relevant today as they were in 500 B.C. During the past 9 years the U.S. and our allies have only begun to understand and appreciate the capabilities and the weaknesses of the global Islamic insurgency, seeing the world as our enemy sees it. The renewed interest in irregular warfare as a means to counter global jihadist operations, however, is still untested as it was developed and implemented in a piecemeal fashion in Afghanistan and Iraq. The test of our resolve and our acceptance of irregular warfare doctrine will take place in failed or failing states

where AQ has been striving to exert their influence, such as Yemen, Pakistan and the Horn of Africa. It is in these locations that we can plan and execute a well developed, fully synchronized indirect approach that incorporates all the instruments of national power under the joint civilian-military authority. While the conflicts in these failing states are of critical strategic importance to our national security efforts, they will also serve as “test beds” to evaluate our irregular warfare doctrine and the civilian-military organizational structure that implements such tactics.

Despite this nascent doctrinal shift toward irregular warfare, there is already a quiet undercurrent of organizational resistance within the U.S. military and among the relevant U.S. departments/agencies that make up the broader interagency community. It is imperative that we resist this historical inclination to grow tired of the protracted nature of indirect warfare, and that we continue to refine and develop our irregular warfare doctrine, tactical and strategic capabilities, and establish an interagency operational center that will strategically plan and synchronize these complex operations. Once and for all, the U.S. must embrace and implement irregular methods of warfare against an irregular enemy, adhering to the guidance that Sun Tzu insightfully laid out over 2500 years ago.

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