

A Hard Day's Night? The United States and the Global War on Terrorism

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This paper examines the jihadist threat and its implications for the global war on terrorism (GWOT)—a threat noted for its commitment, determination, innovation, and lethality. The United States is struggling to configure its instruments of national power to address a threat that has thus far proven unresponsive to these national instruments. The paper argues that the jihadist threat needs to be framed in the context of fundamental changes in the dynamics of the international system. These dynamics have left the United States struggling to conceptually bound and define the jihadist threat in the new security environment. This paper offers explanations for this struggle and concludes that if not successful in bounding and understanding the threat that the United States may win battles in the GWOT, but it can never win the wider war.

“The number of serious international terrorist incidents more than tripled last year, according to U.S. government figures, a sharp upswing in deadly attacks that the State Department has decided not to make public in its annual report on terrorism due to Congress this week.”

Susan B. Glasser, Washington Post, April 27, Page A01

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Passages from the Koran are used within the article. We are acutely aware of the problems associated with the utilization of passages of the Koran in an analysis such as ours. As Olivier Roy forcefully argues in his brilliant book *Globalized Islam: The Search for the New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University, 2004, pp. 41), the use of Koranic passages in political analyses is usually “sterile and only helps to support prejudice.” Our use of Koranic passages is NOT meant to suggest that we believe that the present *jihād* is rooted in Islamic tradition or the Koran. Rather we offer such quotes to illustrate the kinds of passages of the Koran that bin Laden and other *jihadists* have used in their attempt to hijack Islam for their perverted purposes. Our use of these passages should NOT be interpreted or inferred as a belief that the Koran or Islam is responsible for present anti-Western *jihād*. Rather it should be interpreted as recognition that the *jihadists* will twist Islam for their own purposes under a veil of piety.

Introduction

Since the demise of the Soviet Union, political scientists, historians, and policy makers around the world have struggled unsuccessfully to construct a theory that could explain the seemingly new, chaotic global environment. The debate has raged in academic conferences, think-tank events, the op-ed pages of newspapers, talk-show entertainment, and other media. The upshot of much of this debate, however, returns to a simple and salient point: that the chaotic environment is just that—chaotic.

Particularly troubling for the United States and other actors is that the international environment appears unresponsive to the instruments of national power that had successfully preserved stability during the Cold War. The unresponsiveness of the environment to national instruments of power raises critical questions for the United States and its partners as they seek to prosecute something called the “global war on terrorism.” It seems clear that the United States must address the sources of this disconnect if it is to meet the challenges facing it in the international environment.

This disconnect is creating a palpable sense of unease in policy and academic elites due to the apparent inability of the United States to translate its position of global dominance into instruments that can effectively manage various troubling parts of the international system. After all, why can't the United States and its 1.2 million person military (supported by a budget that could top \$500 billion in 2005) control the 7-mile road from the Baghdad airport into the city? And why don't the tribal leaders along the impoverished North West frontier of Pakistan and Afghanistan (that has historically witnessed kidnappings and ransoms as a regular social dynamic) avail themselves of the \$25 million reward (recently increased to \$50 million) for Osama bin Laden (rumored to be frequenting these climes)? Why don't the recruits for emerging new networked terror cells around the world recognize the hopelessness of their apparent objective to recreate an Islamic caliphate?

We posit an answer, or a bridge, that can help the United States and its global partners address these troubling issues. A central argument of this paper is that the international system is being driven by what systems theorists would call “subsystem dynamics,” or forces not explicitly associated with or controlled by nation states.¹ Accepting the growing importance of these forces has profound implications for United States' security strategy and policy in the years ahead as it seeks to prosecute an open-ended war against terrorism around the world. Accepting the growing importance of these subsystem dynamics will require nothing short of an intellectual revolution, since the United States today remains rooted in a paradigm built on the assumption of its global dominance. We believe that this paradigm is disconnected from the international environment.

During the 1990s (and some would argue as early as the 1960s), evidence of the growing salience of subsystem forces emerged as it became steadily more difficult for the remaining hegemon, i.e., the United States, to manage the international environment. Actors engaged in ethnic genocide and other heinous acts that shocked the “civilized” world. When confronted by the United States, instead of submitting to the hegemon's military might, the actors adopted asymmetric tactics as part of a cognitive paradigm that showed little “respect” for the hegemon's statistical superiority or its formidable military capabilities.

Starting in the 1990s, political scientists and historians posited a number of explanations that essentially described the obvious trends in subsystem dynamics. Various arguments emerged that attempted to dissect and understand these dynamics. Samuel Huntington, for example, defined civilizations or cultures as the dominating feature of

the international system² and the principal cause of friction within the global environment. A variety of scholars identified resource scarcity and environmental factors as prominent causes of subsystem friction.³ During the 1990s, the world looked on in horror at the genocide in Rwanda and the brutal ethnic sectarian conflict in the Balkans. Reacting to these events, a school of international relations theory known as “neo-realism” gathered steam. The neo-realists took a dark view of the world—believing that the international system was devolving into the Hobbesian state of nature, where the strong survive and the weak are subjugated.⁴ The neo-realists argued that the United States should adopt a more muscular and aggressive approaches to impose order—a view that has profoundly shaped the Bush Administration’s approach to national security strategy.

The 1990s also saw a technological revolution created by the internet and personal computers supporting the phenomenon of globalization, which became an increasingly powerful force shaping the international system. The increased pace of interaction between states, non-state actors, and individuals around the globe layered yet another level of theoretical complexity over these theoretical arguments.⁵ Globalization has played a role in the declining importance of physical boundaries between states. But while physical distance separating actors is also becoming less important, global interconnectivity is creating new, three-dimensional spaces and networks that have introduced a new level of complexity to the international system. These new spaces are being used by non-state actors for a variety of purposes, some of which are benign and some nefarious, such as the considerable websites used by terrorist organizations to recruit and communicate.

Globalization’s interconnectivity has created its own systemic dynamic that does not easily fit within existing theoretical models of the international system. Global networks promise to continue growing as the movement of data, money, and people throughout the international system accelerate in the years ahead. But while globalization governed by normative rule sets has made physical boundaries less important in a virtual sense, states remain defined by these physical boundaries and they still exist in identifiable geographic areas. The virtual state is not yet a reality.

Despite these profound changes to the international system, it seems clear that protection and oversight over these geographic spaces remain pre-eminent imperatives for states. States inhabit physical spaces and remain charged with protection of these spaces from internal and external threats. States have addressed defense of their geographic spaces in a variety of different ways, depending on threat perception, the means available for protection, and their evaluation of the overall security environment. After spearheading the global defense system that outlasted the Soviet Union, the major industrialized states are in the process of restructuring their defense policies to further their interests and offer protection and security to their citizens. This is particularly the case in the United States, which, in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks, has proclaimed a dramatically redefined global security environment and is taking equally dramatic steps to try and realign its internal organizational structures to better address emerging threats.

While it is true that the reorientation of United States defense policy can be tied to the September 11th attacks, it can also be argued that these changes were in fact long overdue, reflecting a changed international system where new and emerging subsystem dynamics have emerged to drive the overall nature of the broader international framework. What the September 11th attacks simply showed was how wide the delta had become between the threat environment and governmental institutions that were designed to protect the nation. These dominant institutions remained rooted in behavioral and organizational dynamics that reflected the Cold War intellectual paradigm, which had morphed into a sister concept of the United States as global hegemon.

Throughout the 1990s, U.S. thinking on defense policy, planning and budgeting remained essentially rooted in its historic Cold War experience, but the nature of conflict and the tools of warfare were evolving for state and non-state actors. It is now suddenly a cliché to assert, for example, that campaign-style conventional force-on-force wars are being replaced in the lexicon of the United States security community by a new scheme of conventional conflict called “effects based operations,” or “shock and awe” by the press. This scheme of warfare offers the prospect of using force at reduced physical and monetary costs, lower collateral damage, and an integrated targeting scheme designed to undermine the opponent’s will to fight.

Non-state actors have also moved on, with various terrorist organizations embracing a global organizational structure, innovative marketing and fundraising techniques, and new technologies designed to enhance the lethality of their operations and increase the efficiency of their operational structures. Some terrorist organizations now appear interested in acquiring capabilities to cause mass casualties and disruptions to strategic effect. At least as practiced by al Qaeda, tactical and localized attacks intended to exert leverage in pursuit of a narrowly defined political objectives seem to have been overtaken by what many describe as a global insurgency.⁶

The changing nature of conflict and the changing nature of actors populating the international environment all bespeak a changed global security environment. While armed great power conflict is thankfully absent from the international system, chronic instability in the form of ethnocentric and sectarian conflict seems as pervasive as ever. Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the continued existence of states operating outside global behavioral norms (the so-called “rogues”), and emergent globally networked terrorist organizations receive particular emphasis in a wide variety of the Bush administration’s strategy documents.

It must be admitted that the United States is still struggling to conceptually bound and define the security environment. While some applaud the Bush administration’s moral clarity in drawing distinctions between good and evil, critics assert that the so-called global war on terrorism, or GWOT, remains a conceptual morass that has intuitive appeal for domestic political purposes but which is practically useless as a basis on which to develop strategic guidance that can be used to build plans, policies and programs.⁷

However, arguments about the applicability of specific policies, plans, and procedures miss a broader point: that the United States remains conceptually and institutionally mired in a paradigm based on the idea that the United States is now the unrivaled global hegemon. The shift to what political scientists would describe as “unipolarity” is reflected by continual references in policy and academic circles asserting the salience of U.S. statistical superiority relative to other states with the accompanying assertions that this statistical dominance affords the United States unparalleled global power and influence. Data to support this view is readily at hand. The U.S. \$11 trillion gross domestic product accounts for nearly 1/3 of the world’s total; U.S. defense spending represents half of global totals and far outdistances the combined total spending of any combination of its potential rivals. The United States since September 11 has experienced the most rapid surge in military spending since the Korean War. No other country in the world can afford a single fighter aircraft that will cost between \$250–\$325 million each.⁸

Given these irrefutable indicators, it is perhaps not surprising that the instruments of power, organizational, and behavioral structures remain rooted in assumptions that the international framework continues to be defined by its dominant actor, i.e., the United States. This is simply an extension of Cold War logic. But this logic is now disconnected

from an international environment defined not by U.S. hegemony but by the growing influence of subsystem dynamics. Intellectually, it means the United States is left trying to fit a two dimensional square peg into a three-dimensional undefined space. Hence the United States metaphorically faces the lyrically incongruent Lennon/McCartney's "Hard Day's Night."

The troubling implications to these and other subsystem issues suggest that the United States faces a number of profound intellectual and strategic challenges if it is to effectively exercise power and influence the reconfigured global environment: (1) Acknowledgement of the importance of subsystem dynamics as a defining challenge of the evolving international environment; (2) Assessing the threats to U.S. interests based on a corresponding series of assumptions that accept the dominance of subsystem dynamics; (3) Restructuring the nation's institutions to protect and further its interests in such an environment; and (4) Having the political and societal will to execute policies, plans and resources that reflect these realities.

The purpose of this paper is to assess the threats the United States faces in the so-called Global War on Terrorism, or GWOT. In assessing the nature of these threats, this paper will examine a series of implications and characteristics that the threats pose for U.S. policies and counterterrorism strategies and tactics. In defining the nature and characteristics of these threats, this paper will attempt to provide a terrorist perspective on the relevant religious, cultural, political, and military domains of the GWOT.⁹ Consideration of this perspective can offer a radically different paradigm for suggesting policy prescriptions and implications when compared to those commonly used in policy circles that remain driven by uni- and bipolar assumptions and prescriptions.

Understanding the threats from the perspective of the "terrorist" is challenging and troubling. As will be evident below, such a perspective challenges modal assumptions concerning American prestige, power, and influence as well as the underlying structure of the international system. Indeed, the connotations of many of terrorist perspectives seem to imply that while the United States may very well win each military campaign associated with the GWOT this does not equate with winning a broader war being driven by powerful subsystem dynamics.

A New American Strategic Imperative—Counterterrorism

The United States has embraced the idea that there is a new and overriding threat to its interests. Following the September 11th attacks, the Bush Administration released a series of strategy documents all of which indicate that the "global war on terrorism" is now the principal security problem facing the United States, replacing the Cold War as a unifying theme for national security strategy. As noted by President Bush in the introduction of National Security Strategy report: "Enemies in the past needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger America. Now shadowy networks of individuals can bring great chaos and suffering to our shores for less than it costs to purchase a single tank. Terrorists are organized to penetrate open societies and to turn the power of modern technology against us."¹⁰

The National Strategy to Combat Terrorism identifies a variety of critical national goals and objectives in the context of the struggle against terrorism: (1) Identify and locate terrorists, terrorist organizations and their command, and control and support infrastructure; (2) Deny sponsorship, support, and sanctuary to terrorists and ending state sponsorship of terrorism; (3) Establish and maintain an international standard of accountability; (4) Strengthen and sustain the international effort to fight terrorism; (5) Interdict

and disrupt material support; (6) Eliminate terrorist sanctuaries and havens; (7) Diminish the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit.¹¹

If terrorism represents the principal threat facing the United States, that makes the mission of counterterrorism a pre-eminent organizing principle to build relevant capabilities for those government agencies that have a role in the fight. The United States' counterterrorism policy consists of four basic positions: (1) Make no concessions to terrorists and strike no deals; (2) Bring terrorists to justice for their crimes; (3) Isolate and apply pressure on states that sponsor terrorism to force them to change their behavior; (4) Bolster the counterterrorism capabilities of those countries that work with the U.S. and require assistance.¹²

Implementation of counterterrorism policy falls across the variety of different governmental agencies. But it seems clear that the U.S. military and the Department of Defense will assume prominent roles in execution of the GWOT. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers, unequivocally states that the war on terrorism is the military's top priority in the introduction to the National Military Strategy:

First while protecting the United States we must win the War on Terrorism. The attacks of September 11, 2001 demonstrated that our liberties are vulnerable. The prospect of future attacks, potentially employing weapons of mass destruction, makes it imperative that we act now to stop the terrorists before they can attack again. We must continue to root out transnational terrorist networks, sever their connections with state sponsors, eliminate their bases of operations, counter dangerous proliferation and establish a global anti-terrorism environment."¹³

While the Bush administration's strategy documents also universally note that the fight against terrorism will require an integrated government-wide approach using law enforcement, diplomacy, international organizations, strategic communications, and other capabilities, it is fair to say that much of the responsibility for prosecuting a sustained global campaign against terrorists will fall to the United States military—dubbed by one commentator as the new "sheriff" in the international system.¹⁴

A variety of factors will drive the military's pre-eminent counterterrorism role. The first overriding imperative is that the United States is not conducting a defensive battle that relies on containment and deterrence. All of the Bush administration's strategy documents clearly indicate the desire to preemptively take the fight to the enemy wherever it is and attack terrorist groups before they can threaten the American homeland. That means fighting forward.

The military's forward deployed global posture developed during the Cold War will figure prominently in a variety of counter-terrorist missions. The Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) and the National Military Strategy highlight the critical and increasingly important role that these forces will play. The QDR notes that: "Over time, [forward deployed] U.S. forces will be tailored increasingly to maintain favorable regional balances in concert with U.S. Allies and friends with the aim of swiftly defeating attacks with only modes reinforcement and, where necessary, assuring access for follow-on forces."¹⁵ Echoing this theme, the National Military Strategy notes: "Combatant commanders, employing a mix of forward-stationed rotational and temporarily deployed capabilities tailored to perform specific missions, improve our ability to act within and across borders, strengthen the role of partners and expand joint and multinational capabilities. Posture and presence enhancements also serve to assure our friends, improve the ability to prosecute

the WOT [war on terrorism]; deter, dissuade, and defeat other threats; and support transformation.”¹⁶ The Defense Department is in the process of realigning its global military posture to better address threats in the so-called “arc of crisis” that are widely seen as part of GWOT. As part of the plan, the United States has developed operating areas in the Central Asian Republics and Pakistan, which complement the existing infrastructure in the Persian Gulf.

A second powerful reason driving the U.S. military’s counter-terrorism role is means. The Bush administration’s fiscal year 2005 defense budget that will exceed \$500 billion (including anticipated requirements for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan) now represents about half of all global defense spending, providing the United States military with resources available to no other country and no other part of the federal government. The U.S. military remains one of the only organizations in the world capable of conducting sustained operations simultaneously in far-flung parts the globe on the scale that is required. The U.S. military can do global logistics like nobody else.

A third reason driving the U.S. military counterterrorism role is domestic politics. The United States public is being told by its political leadership that the nation is “at war.” By drawing upon a “war” metaphor, the nation’s political leadership creates an understandable perception and expectation that the military is engaged in operations to defeat the adversary and defend the homeland. Such an approach seemed clear the day after the September 11th attacks when the Navy was ordered out to sea to patrol the nation’s coastlines—although the presence of these ships on the day of the attacks could not have foiled Mohammed Atta and his fellow conspirators. The domestic political pressure to keep the military continuously engaged shows no sign of letting up. And, it has to be noted that the public wants to know that the billions of dollars lavished on their nation’s military are being used to forestall adversaries and protect the homeland—a mission that U.S. military institutions are embracing with reluctance.

A fourth reason is history. The historical experience and expertise gained during the Cold War in conducting coalition warfare is relevant for combating terrorist groups around the world. The conflict will require a sustained long-term, even open-ended commitment, that will require coalition partners providing access to military facilities and joint operations that will build interoperability on an ongoing basis. The United States constructed these partnerships all over the world during the Cold War—partnerships that will have to be resurrected and maintained over long periods just as they were in the post World War II period. In parallel, the United States will have to re-energize its programs to build host-nation military capabilities through foreign military sales and training—programs that will need to be coordinated through training missions manned with military officers and trained civilians. Building these military-to-military relationships will also involve exchanges in professional military education as well as joint exercises and training, which will again replicate activities developed during the Cold War.

The collective documentation and reorientation of the country’s security establishment as highlighted in the Bush administration’s various strategy documents is impressive. But despite the rhetorical embrace of battling new and shadowy enemies, it remains unclear that the cold war security paradigm has in fact been banished to the dustbin of history. The same strategy documents that proclaim the dawn of a new era in the global security environment also proclaim unbridled confidence that the United States maintains its ability to shape and manage and ultimately control the dynamics of the international environment. The documents essentially assert a belief in U.S. hegemonic power.

Interestingly, in 1991 President George H. Bush flirted with the idea of embracing fundamental and structural change in the international environment. Months after the

conclusion of the first Gulf War on September 11, 1991 in his “New World Order” Speech, Bush suggested that:

Out of these troubled times . . . a new world order can emerge: a new era—freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace. . . . Today that new world is struggling to be born. A world quite different from the one we’ve known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice. A world where the strong respects the rights of the weak.¹⁷

In this speech, President Bush expressed intuitive recognition that the era of dominate system actors was drawing to a close—a dramatic departure from the model that drove the U.S. national security establishment for the previous 60 years. Bush’s speech recognized and accepted that global subsystems would become the main driver in international dynamics. But this speech was soon forgotten amidst an election campaign fought on domestic issues. The inability of the United States to embrace his ideas has created an overriding sense of confusion and cognitive dissonance that continues to this day. Describing the nation’s Cold War adversary seemed relatively straightforward and became intellectually comfortable as this description became part of an overall cognitive belief structure. Today the international environment is characterized not by cognitive consistency but by cognitive dissonance.

President Bush’s speech proved prescient. During the 1990s, the ascendancy of subsystem dynamics became apparent. In Somalia, the United States confronted a discommodulated landscape and a foe that appeared manifestly unimpressed by U.S. military capabilities. Aideed’s militias showed no regard for the human cost of confronting the United States, bloodied the U.S. military’s nose using asymmetric tactics and convinced President Clinton that further intervention was pointless. With the searing experience of Somalia still figuring prominently, the United States stood on the sidelines in Rwanda and again watched in disbelief as one tribal actor turned on another in a brutal genocide. In the Balkans, the United States once again confronted a subsystem dynamic that defied the Cold War rule sets, though it did eventually lead an international coalition to stop the conflict by deploying forces to separate the warring parties. The rest of the decade saw the U.S. military engaged around the world in what became derisively known (in the military) as Military Operations Other than War, or MOOTW. During the election campaign in 2001, candidate George W. Bush indicated his commitment to put an end to these messy and open-ended operations that were chewing up manpower, money and equipment.

The September 11 attacks of course changed this approach. In his address to a joint session of Congress nine days after September 11 attacks, President George W. Bush suggested that the world envisioned by his father 10 years earlier had been turned upside down and he darkly warned states harboring terrorists to:

Deliver to the United States authorities all the leaders of al Qaeda who hide in your land. Release all foreign nationals, including American citizens, you have unjustly imprisoned. Protect foreign journalists, diplomats and aid workers in your country. Close immediately and permanently every terrorist training camp in Afghanistan, and hand over every terrorist, and every person in their support structure, to appropriate authorities. Give the United States full

access to terrorist training camps, so we can make sure they are no longer operating. . . . Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.¹⁸

Bush's stark words provided a harbinger of the initial conceptual outlines of what would become known as GWOT—the central priority of U.S. national security policy. Two weeks after delivering this speech, the U.S. attacked the Taliban and al Qaeda—initially named *Operation Infinite Justice*. Protests from Muslim countries lead to the changing of the mission's name to *Operation Enduring Freedom* (OEF) on September 25, 2001.

The initial overwhelming international support for OEF and the United Nations' endorsement of a renewed global effort against terrorists seemed to signal a new global coalition lead by the United States to reimpose order in the international system. Today, however, the United States finds itself in a position of international isolation and even disrepute. It seems inconceivable to many that United States' policies based on President Bush's formulation that "Freedom is the non-negotiable demand of human dignity; the birthright of every person—in every civilization"¹⁹ are not being embraced around the world. Instead the United States is confronted by powerful subsystem dynamics manifesting as an ideology that casts what seem like noble, moral and universal truths as secondary to imperial ambition, cultural and religious subjugation and support for tyrants and dictators.

In short, the United States remains intellectually suspended between competing universes that are defined by fundamentally opposed views of the nature of the global system. The United States believes in itself as the hegemon, while much of the rest of the world marches to the beat of the global subsystem drummer. The intellectual bridge between these competing universes lies for the United States in returning to Sun Tzu's age-old strategic axiom of "know thy enemy."

Understanding the Threat

"Jihad is as essential to Islamic identity and self-definition as the Mass is to Catholicism."
—Historian Malise Ruthven²⁰

"The focus of the U.S. is against the concept of jihad. Jihad in Islam is one of the greatest actions to repulse tyranny and to restore justice and rights."
—Dr. Mohammed Abd al-Hali, Cairo's al-Azhar University²¹

"[Global trends] are working against the notion that a nation strongly armed is adequately shielded against all threats to it and its interests. . . . Even today, knowledge of one's enemy and his culture and society may be more important than knowledge of his order of battle".
—Retired Vice ADM Arthur Cebrowski²²

The United States has only recently begun to recognize the nature of the threat it is facing in GWOT. As argued in the 9-11 Commission Report, prior to the September 11th attack the U.S. did not understand its enemy and did not give significant weight to the terrorist threat.²³ While significant improvement has been realized in threat recognition since the 9-11 Report was published, the Bush Administration still appears confused about the nature and implications of the *jihad* or Muslim insurgency. The most realistic and

best official description of the phenomenon appears in the recent draft *Joint Operational Concept for Defeating Terrorist Organizations (JOC-DTO)* November 14, 2004.²⁴ This is a planning document being drafted by the Special Operations Command in Tampa, Florida. Once finalized, the document will form the basis for the development of joint capabilities throughout the Defense Department to defeat terrorist organizations. These capabilities will, in turn, form the basis for programs and budgets. The JOCs being developed throughout the nation's military institutions are part of the Defense Department's implementation of capabilities-based planning.

There is little argument that the United States is facing a *jihad* that is perceived by its proponents as a holy and just war to defend the Muslim faith. This *jihad* is a world-wide, primarily Arab,²⁵ insurgency that is not based on merely terrorist acts or acts of criminality. Nor is this *jihad* based on or represented by oft repeated Bush Administration rhetoric that the "terrorist evildoers" act because of their hate for democracy or American freedoms. Such beliefs represent not only impoverished and inaccurate views of the threat but also trivialize the threat implications and obscure appropriate policy prescriptions and actions.²⁶

A more nuanced view is being developed by the Special Operations Command, or SOCOM. The *JOC-DTO* states, "Despite the use of modern technologies by all parties, the fundamental nature of this war is an insurgency—a struggle for popular perceptions of political legitimacy and control over Islamic civilization that extends beyond national borders."²⁷ SOCOM's realization of the nature of the threat provides a healthy and welcome departure from simplistic sound-bytes delivered in press conferences and talk shows by senior administration officials.

Intellectual precision as to the nature of the threat and difficulties facing the United States in mitigating the threat is critical. Taking a cue from the adversary could be instructive.

For example, bin Laden has been

extremely precise when he states that he is waging a holy war against the United States.²⁸ This war is not necessarily directed at American freedoms, liberty,²⁹ or democracy.³⁰ However, from the perspective of many Muslim theocrats, democracies and socialist governments undermine Islam in traditionally Muslim countries/areas.³¹ The goal of these adherents is to see *Allah's* religion reign supreme over the entire world. That means the establishment of Muslim theocracies. In order to do such democracies, socialist and any other form of government must eventually be destroyed. Key to understanding the *jihadists'* beliefs is their view that polices of the United States and its apostate Muslim friends³² are directly aimed at harming and undermining "true" Islam and its faithful.³³ Muslim extremists primarily hate and attack the United States because of their perception of U.S. actions not American values.³⁴

Bin Laden and other *jihadists* sincerely believe that the West and primarily the United States represents a mortal danger to Islam. In the *jihadist's* eyes U.S. policy

The true believers fight for the cause of Allah, but the infidels fight for the devil. Fight then against the friends of Satan.

Koran 4:75

Prophet rouse the faithful to arms.

Koran 8:65

Never think that those who were slain in the cause of Allah are dead. They are alive and well provided for by their Lord. . . .

Koran 3:169

and actions irrefutably confirm this belief. The United States supports and mandates the Zionists to continue their occupation of Palestine;³⁵ U.S. troops remain in Saudi Arabia, the land of the two holy shrines; the United States supports apostate tyrants;³⁶ the United States “occupies” Afghanistan and Iraq and threatens Syria and Iran; the United States is establishing bases in the Middle East, the Gulf, and South and Central Asia; the United States steals Muslim natural resources, most prominently oil, and; quite simply American and Western corruption threatens Muslim souls. In the eyes of *ihadists*, the United States has become the restorer of European 19th and 20th Century colonialism and *ihad* is the only antidote to the United States and its explicitly hostile policies towards Islam. Bin Laden and other *ihadist* insurgents “mean exactly what they say: to them America is the font of all evil, the ‘head of the snake,’ and it must be converted or destroyed.”³⁷

What makes the *ihadists*’ convictions so threatening and problematic are that they are based on the belief that they are fighting a defensive *ihad* against the United States and its allies.³⁸ Moreover, this defensive *ihad* is revealed by *Allah* in the Koran and the *Sunnah*³⁹ and thus not subject to interpretation. Islam has been attacked and it is the personal duty and responsibility of every Muslim to fight back to the death if necessary. A lack of a response to this attack by an individual Muslim in the eyes of bin Laden and other *ihadist* insurgents is tantamount to sin and eternal damnation. These are powerful motivating forces and cannot be taken lightly by policy responses, strategies or organizations.

The JOC-DTO analyses the nature of the threat in a fashion similar to that presented above, but while it argues that the GWOT is really a war against a global insurgency, the JOC-DTO states that the individual *ihadist* does not view him or herself as an insurgent. The DoD defines an insurgent as a “member of a political party who rebels against established leadership.”⁴⁰ The JOC-DTO argues that individual *ihadists*

“[d]o not see themselves as terrorists or even as political insurgents, but rather as holy warriors engaged in a heroic and epic struggle inspired by an all-encompassing religious *mythos*. [The *ihadists*] are motivated by a different morality than we are accustomed to in the Western world. They interpret Islamic law literally and without regard for its historical context. They do not recognize international (Western) laws of war or any Western notions of morality that contradict Islamic law. [They] believe that:

- [1] Uniquely Islamic rhythms of history compel them to pursue violent change to restore Islam after generations of corruption.
- [2] Islam is under attack by the West and that it is their holy obligation to defend their faith against this attack.
- [3] Their cause is just and right-minded and that their victory is preordained and inevitable.
- [4] The act of struggle itself is a triumph that unites them with God; they cannot be defeated, as the West defines the term, so long as they continue the perpetual struggle.

[They] do not recognize the Western concept of statehood or the Western concept of state monopolies on the legitimate use of political violence. [They] do not recognize any distinction between religion and politics. [And they] do not apply Islamic prohibitions against unlimited warfare to those Muslims or non-Muslims who live their lives outside our enemies’ literal and intolerant interpretation of Islamic law.⁴¹

American Islamic scholar Professor Bernard Lewis has argued that “Islam is not only a matter of faith and practice, it is also an identity and a loyalty—for many an identity that transcends all others.”⁴² The United States faces a *jihadi* mentality that transcends the individual and which reflects the *jihadi*’s views of the tenets of his core faith and personage. The unalterable law of *Allah* is the source of response.

Believers, when you encounter infidels on the march, do not turn your backs to them in flight. If anyone on that day turns his back to them, except for tactical reasons, or to join another band, he shall incur the wrath of Allah and Hell shall be his home; an evil fate.

Koran 8:15

What more powerful motivating temporal or spatial force could the United States face? And militarily conquering a state or occupying a nation’s capital cannot defeat this force. For this is truly a transnational *jihadi* movement. It is not contained within any border or borders. This *jihadi* mentality some argue reflects the style of pre-Islamic warfare on the Arabian Peninsula and results in a perpetual condition of warfare and not a finite undertaking of a war. This conception flies in the face of western linear conceptions of conflict and war.

Make war on them until idolatry shall cease and Allah’s religion shall reign supreme.

Koran 8:39

The Bush administration’s statements that terrorists are motivated primarily by their hate of our freedoms and democracy are matched to a public diplomacy and information campaigns directed at “educating” the Muslim masses of the true nature of the United States.⁴³ This public diplomacy campaign is probably destined for failure, since it fails to reflect an appreciation for the subsystem dynamics that are defined by the *jihadi*’s hate that, from the U.S. perspective, can only be met by direct and violent military actions.

Whether unarmed or well equipped, march on and fight for the cause of Allah. . . .

Koran 9:41

The *jihadi*s initial aim is deterring the United States militarily (including WMD) from attacking things they love—their faith, brethren, and land. There is little convincing evidence to suggest that they view violence and conflict as an end in itself.

Do Muslim theocrats want peace? Absolutely. But peace is not defined as the absence of armed conflict. Violence and conflict are one side of the *jihad*. Converting and establishing theocracies is another side of the *jihad*. There can be no peace for the Muslim theocrat while wicked sinners, idolatrous religions and secular governments exist. Peace is the resultant that occurs after the enemies of *Allah* have been killed or converted and *Allah*’s religion reigns supreme. From the Muslim theocrat’s perspective only then will there be peace. This is the nature of the threat that the U.S. faces.

Reactions to the Threat

On October 16, 2003 Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld raised a series of critical questions concerning the United States and the GWOT to the Defense Department’s senior staff.⁴⁴ Rumsfeld’s memo expressed concern about the ability of the U.S. to execute and win the GWOT. The well-formulated and profound questions in fact reflect

a deeper intellectual confusion over the nature of the threat and its implications for strategy, policy and organizational structure. Rumsfeld, for example, asked:

- Are we winning or losing the Global War on Terror?
- Is DoD changing fast enough to deal with the new 21st century security environment?
- Can a big institution (such as DoD) change fast enough?
- Is the United States government changing fast enough?⁴⁵

Implicitly recognizing the immense implications of GWOT on the U.S. military and defense strategy, Rumsfeld comments that, “DoD has been organized, trained and equipped to fight big armies, navies and air forces. It is not possible to change DoD fast enough to successfully fight the global war on terror; an alternative might be to try to fashion a new institution, either within DoD or elsewhere—one that seamlessly focuses the capabilities of several departments and agencies on this key problem.”⁴⁶ Months earlier Rumsfeld raised similar issues when he wrote in the *Transformation Planning Guidance* that “[t]he war on terrorism is a transformational event that cries out for us to rethink our activities, and to put that new thinking into action.” Rumsfeld defined transformation as “a process that shapes the changing nature of the military’s competition, capabilities, people and organizations that exploit our nation’s advantages and protect against our asymmetric vulnerabilities.”⁴⁷

The implications of Rumsfeld’s queries remain important. The assumptions underlying his questions are central to the argument of this paper: that the United States remains intellectually and organizationally rooted in an outmoded view of the international system. Rumsfeld’s disquiet, it could be argued, flows from an intuitive recognition that the structure of the international system has moved on, creating the mismatch between that system and U.S. institutions designed to manage that system.

A Military Conundrum: Missions and Requirements

Despite the relevance of certain aspects of the Cold War experience, the U.S. military faces a much more complicated and even contradictory set of mission requirements as part of GWOT. These basic missions can be summarized as follows:

- Deny sanctuary to terrorist groups afforded by state sponsors and geographic areas outside the control of central governments. This latter category entails operations in some of the most remote and lawless areas of the world, such as the tri-border region in South America, the Horn of Africa, the Central Asian Republics, and the tribal border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan. It also means maintaining a series of active and ongoing military activities in support of a political coercive and compellant framework designed to prevent states from supporting terrorist groups.
- Identify, track and destroy terrorist groups before those groups can mount attacks on the U.S. homeland. This mission will be accomplished by forward-deployed surveillance assets, allowing quick targeting and destruction of identified targets—preferably at standoff ranges using the new family of precision guided munitions, and, if necessary, force-on-force engagements using special operations forces or forward deployed conventional forces.
- Work with coalition partners in forward operating areas to defeat terrorist groups, with particular emphasis on those countries being threatened by insurgents.

- Engage in psychological and information operations that will discredit *jihadi* ideologies that are at the core of the insurgent ideology.
- Help create conditions in which terrorist groups lose their legitimacy and base of support within the broader population. This returns the military to its MOOTW functions, involving the military in law enforcement, road building and other so-called “stability” operations.
- Retain the flexibility to engage in a variety of forms of warfare, ranging from conventional military operations to “irregular” or counterinsurgency operations.
- Collect intelligence that includes all the targets in forward operating areas.

These mission sets create a series of problems for the U.S. military. The fundamental contradictions in any counterinsurgency strategy are clearly evident in the military requirements. The military is being directed to conduct information operations to delegitimize the adversary while it must simultaneously destroy the adversary using tactics and techniques that undermine the ability to conduct the information side of the campaign. This phenomenon is on vivid display in Iraq right now. The fundamental counterinsurgency conundrum is also exacerbated by the widespread view that battling the al-Qaeda ideology is considered not primarily a military problem.

Despite efforts to elevate the role of special operations forces, the U.S. military remains largely organized, equipped and trained to fight a large-scale conventional war. The GWOT requirement to exert control over remote geographic spaces necessitates conducting widespread stability operations inside these divergent locations in order to mitigate the conditions where terrorist grow and flourish. These operations cannot be accomplished on the scale necessary with the current organizational structure. The U.S. military resembles a vat with its tap located at the top; each time the vat is tapped for those forces that are needed the most in MOOTW missions—military police, civic affairs specialists and training experts. The bulk of the “combat” force remains underutilized, while those elements at the top of the vat and needed for the GWOT are overburdened, under funded and ill equipped for the mission. Despite Secretary Rumsfeld’s efforts to “transform” the military, the organizational structures remain grounded in a platform-centric approach to conflict and warfare. Platforms continue to drive planning, programming and budgeting within the \$500+ billion Defense Department budget.

The United States military remains ill prepared to conduct operations in culturally opaque regions in the world. Fifty years of Soviet-centric study and education have left an education and training structure that must be geared up to provide language and cultural awareness on a wide-scale for intelligence analysts, officers and enlisted personnel. In Iraq, for example, commanders still face shortages of translators and personnel grounded in the region’s history and culture. Correcting these steps on an institutional level will take no less than a paradigm shift for the U.S. military, which currently de-emphasizes regional and cultural expertise. In most U.S. military organizations, seeking this expertise is a career-limiting move for personnel. The Navy, for example, has no dedicated career track for foreign area officers despite the fact that it has been continuously deployed around the world for much of the last century.

GWOT requirements entail nearly continuous operations conducted on a global scale, straining the readiness of forces that are equipped for campaign-style linear operations that have a beginning and an end. This is particularly the case in the Navy, which has historically been driven by a maintenance cycle founded upon the idea that aircraft carriers could remain at sea for 6 months, followed by an 18-months of in-port maintenance. The Navy is now moving towards something called global CONOPS, or global concept

of operations, in which this historic cycle has been broken. It is unclear whether and how long the Navy can function in an environment requiring continuous operations and maintenance-intensive high readiness levels and correspondingly difficult manning and personnel issues. The Army, Marine Corps and Air Force all face similar challenges.

Implications of the Threat

There is little doubt that the GWOT involves a threat domain radically different to those traditionally faced by U.S. military that at its root is based on new subsystem dynamics within the international system. Secretary Rumsfeld implies in the aforementioned memo, as well as in his “transformation planning guidance,” the threats and associated dynamics of the GWOT require new institutional, doctrinal, and structural changes within DoD.⁴⁸ The purpose of the next section of this paper is to assess the implications these threats represent to U.S. counterterrorism policy and policy instruments.

Relevant Beliefs and Perception are Zero-Sum Games

The United States was originally founded by refugees of religious persecution. The basic belief that society and polity is best served by a separation between church and state has become an engrained staple of American political and social belief. Islam, the source of the *jihadists*, however, has a radically different view. For the average Muslim, and profoundly for the *jihadist*, religion is the source of all moral support, the basis for regulating conflict and the foundation for all society, governmental organization, law, and ultimately the justification for war. Indeed, for the Muslims the separation of religion and government is apostasy for the simple and seemingly profound reason that only *Allah* makes laws not man. Bin Laden clearly suggested the differences in the two belief systems when he wrote in his “2002 Letter to Americans” that “[Americans] rather than ruling by the law of *Allah*, chose to implement your own inferior rules and regulations, thus following your own vain whims and desires. You run a society contrary to the nature of mankind by separating religion from your politics.”⁴⁹

Al-Qaeda’s Training Manual addresses its belief on the congruency of the entirety of religious and political life when it states:

“Allah realized that Islam is not just performing rituals but a complete system: Religion and government, worship and Jihad [holy war], ethics and dealing with people, and the Koran and sword. The bitter situation that the nation has reached is a result of its divergence from Allah’s course and his righteous law for all places and times. That Allah realized that Islam is not just performing rituals but [bitter situation] came about as a result of its children’s love for the world, their loathing of death, and their abandonment of Jihad [holy war].”⁵⁰

In the context of such conflicting belief systems, perceptions concerning all aspects of social and political life become absolutely critical. Consider, for example, the case of Islamic educational centers or *madrassas*. While the United States advocates the reasonable reform of *madrassas*’ curriculum that it believes ferments hatred of modernity and the West, such policy prescriptions are viewed by many Muslims as American demands for Muslim’s to abandon *Allah’s law* for man-made law. When the United States asks Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and other Muslim regimes to limit, track, and control Muslim tithing and religious charity that assist the poor, refugees, or embattled brethren, *jihadists*,

as well as moderate Muslims, perceive such a policy as inhibiting *zakat*—one of the five pillars of Islam.⁵¹ When the United States understandably incarcerates and declares *jihadists* as criminals, bin Laden argues that the American state challenges *Allah's* word and holy disciples and martyrs. “Islam does not coincide or make a truce with unbelief; but rather confronts it.”⁵²

In social science parlance, these contradictory positions are truly zero-sum games; there is no room for rational diplomacy with the *jihadists* only nonnegotiable demands and positions.⁵³ The United States still has difficulty recognizing this fact. It gives us no solace to posit that the primary way to win (and we are not even sure what “win” means in this context) the GWOT war (at least against the *jihadists*) is through violent and aggressive military means.

It is important to recognize that bin Laden's and other *jihadists'* political positions are based on their understanding and beliefs concerning Islam. Even trying to separate politics from religion in the *jihadist's* eyes is a grave misnomer and, as well, a blasphemy.

Yet the U.S. also represents an opportunity to the *jihadist*. It presents bin Laden and other *jihadists* with a common enemy and hence, can represent a basis of unity for radical Islamists. The U.S. and the West, in general, as an enemy allow the *jihadists* to harness local commitment to their global struggle and from the *jihadists* perspective, promote the continual unification of Muslim *Umma* (community). Fighting the *jihad* not only benefits the individual because of the religious obligation associated with it,⁵⁴ it also benefits the larger Muslim community through united pious action against its enemies.

How does the United States deal in such a zero-sum world? It appears unlikely that the *jihadists* will modify their behavior; for they remain unaffected by the West's perceptions of their actions, hoping this indifference instills a widespread sense of vulnerability in the public. The United States, however, must continually assess actions and policies as to how they will be perceived by more moderate sectors of the Islamic world—those that the Muslim theocrat consider to be “apostate”. Modification of the *jihadist* or theocrats' views is nonsense; analyzing actions and policies to affect theocratic perceptions, it could be argued, is a waste of time given that the Muslim theocrats believe that U.S. is an enemy of *Allah*, and thus at war with the U.S. All the actions and policies of the U.S. will be perceived as wrong or evil because the U.S. has rejected Allah, His Laws, His Prophet and follow man's laws.

This ideological war is a war for hearts and minds, but not as traditionally conceptualized. The challenge for the United States is to merely hold its ground in the eyes of the moderate Muslim World and avoid any disastrous public relation nightmares. The actual control of the relevant hearts and minds by the United States is something that probably will not happen. As the Defense Department's new counter-terror guidance cogently notes: “Ultimately, however, winning the ideological war will depend on the individual and collective ability of the Armed Forces to wage ‘culture-centric warfare’ in which understanding indigenous people and their culture is at least as important as tactical military victories.”⁵⁵

Cultural and Religious Intelligence and Sensitivity Becomes Critical

As suggested above, while winning the ideological war will be next to impossible by the United States this does not mean that the U.S. can ignore cultural and religious issues. Secretary Rumsfeld was recently quoted as stating: “Transforming is as much about culture and people [as about programs].”⁵⁶ It is critical that U.S. policies and actions are developed and pursued with an understanding as to how such actions will be perceived

by the Muslim World. The U.S. will never win over the *ihadists* but it must at least hold its own relative the Muslim moderates and masses. And to accomplish this, the U.S. must continually be aware of its moral standing. This is especially true now that the Arab and Muslim press such as *al Jazeera* has expanded its coverage of regional and world affairs. As the 9-11 Commission Report suggests, the U.S. GWOT policies “should be accompanied by a preventive strategy that is as much, or more, political as it is military. The strategy must clearly focus on the Arab and Muslim world, in all its variety.”⁵⁷

This also implies that the United States must demonstrate moral leadership and occupy the moral high ground, but this can be a daunting task during a war and post-9-11 world environment. Events such as U.S. prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib have damning short- and long-term implications, and indeed represent a gift to the *ihadists* because such events have the capacity to confirm their views of the moral bankruptcy of the United States, motivate their supporters and influence fence sitters. Fighting terror with terror is not only unproductive; it can also enhance the insurgent’s popular support.

The United States must sensitize its policy makers and war fighters to Muslim cultural and religious matters. Such sensitivity to include appropriate language skills has the added value of enhancing the development of actionable intelligence. Without such skills U.S. troops will not be able to adequately interact with the population and indigenous troops. As bluntly stated by U.S. Brigadier General Caret Ham, who commands the task force for the Mosul area in northern Iraq, “We don’t lack for people to go thump in the night; the challenge is getting the intel.”⁵⁸ Cultural and religious knowledge has both strategic and tactical significance.

The importance of understanding American culture, which they despise, is surely not lost on the *ihadists*. While the U.S. needs to understand the Muslim cultures to avoid making disastrous policy choices as well enhancing its possibility for collecting actionable intelligence, the *ihadists* struggle to understand Western cultures because it has important tactical implications. For example, the arrival of the *ihadists* from Hamburg (Mohammed Atta, et. al.) was a godsend for al-Qaeda because of the group’s relative familiarity with Western culture and their considerable English language skills.⁵⁹ These skills are much sought after by bin Laden and have been critical in the formulation of *ihadist* attack cells and their strategies.

Sheer Numbers can be Daunting

With approximately 1.4 billion followers worldwide Islam is the second most popular and fastest growing religion in the world. Muslims reside in every country of the world. These demographics have important implications for the GWOT, especially in the context of bin Laden wanting a clash of civilizations. In addition the *ihadist* ideology has proven to be “a widely-appealing ideology that legitimizes the movement while it generates all types of support and new recruits.”⁶⁰

It is relatively clear that the majority of the world’s Muslims are not proponents or supporters of bin Laden’s *ihad*. Nevertheless, the size of the Muslim world population theoretically means that the *ihadists* have a vast reservoir of potential recruits. This potential reservoir of recruits and supporters, as suggested above, are a major impetus for al Qaeda actions. The JOC-DTO suggests that the “global insurgency” is already “supported by millions of sympathizers and enablers among the world’s Muslim population.”⁶¹

This presents a particular dilemma for the United States. The U.S. pursuit of the GWOT can have the very real consequence of creating recruits for the *ihadists*. The U.S. war and occupation of Iraq is a recent and instructive illustration of this dynamic.

It has been argued by some that the war and occupation was a blessing for bin Laden and has served as a recruiting poster for the *ihadists*.⁶² It has opened up a new front for the *ihad* and has provided a new radicalizing and bonding experience for young recruits.⁶³ Recent estimates suggest that the Iraqi insurgency is comprised of more than 200,000 people, with an estimated 40,000 hard-guerillas engaged in operations against U.S. forces.⁶⁴ Iraq is proving to be valuable ground for the insurgents and *ihadists* to gain valuable field experience and test new tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs). Some have gone as far as to argue that the U.S. failure to achieve a quick military and political victory in Iraq, is giving the *ihadists* exactly the type of conflict—an insurgency—they desired.⁶⁵ We have seen a similar phenomenon in Afghanistan where there are troubling reports that the Taliban are regrouping to challenge the perceived U.S. occupation and President Karzai's regime that is presumed to be an American puppet.

Muslim states generally have been very reluctant to join the American "coalition of the willing" primarily because of the assumed domestic repercussions. Many of these regimes have volatile internal problems that are difficult enough to control without opening the door to the possible consequences resulting from explicitly supporting U.S. war efforts. Explicit support of the GWOT is viewed as a harbinger for regime threatening domestic instability. It is interesting to note that the combined gross domestic product of the 22 countries in the Arab League is less than the GDP of Spain.⁶⁶ Domestic problems abound in this world and its leaders are constantly avoiding sparks that might ignite a greater fire.

The insurgency in Iraq, of course, has demonstrated how difficult it can be for moderate Muslim leaders to govern in the face of a determined *ihadist* opposition. From October 1, 2004 to December 4, 2004, according to U.S. military figures, a total of 338 Iraqis working with the new Iraqi governing structures had been assassinated, including 35 police chiefs, mayors, and middle-ranking officials.⁶⁷

The silence of support offered to the U.S. in their campaigns against the *ihadists* by the moderate Muslim international community has been deafening. Few Muslim leaders with the exception of Pakistan's President Musharraf have had the gumption or commitment to the GWOT to commit significant resources and explicit policies to support the United States. And in the case of Musharraf, he only committed his support after being given a series of nonnegotiable demands by the Bush Administration in the immediate days after 9-11 and before the U.S. Afghanistan campaign commenced.⁶⁸ Since lending his support to the United States, Musharraf has been the target of two assassination attempts.

Ultimately, a key indicator of the eventual success of the GWOT is how U.S. policies and actions are perceived by the moderate Muslim Community and how successful the U.S. is at physically separating the *ihadist* organizations from the societies in which they operate and from which they draw their resources.

How should one interpret the fact that over the last few years Osama has become one of the most popular names for Arab Muslim male infants? Or consider recent opinion polls of Arab Muslim populations as to their perspectives of the United States. American engagement in much of the world is resented. For example, only 15% of the Egyptian and 12% of the Saudi Arabian population has a favorable opinion of the United States. In 2003 two-thirds of those polled in countries from Turkey to Indonesia were very or somewhat fearful that the U.S. might eventually "attack them."⁶⁹

While it would be a fallacy to judge the naming of an infant or the results of an opinion poll as definitive data as to the popularity of the *ihadists* or the negative image of the United States, it does suggest that there are troubling undercurrents in the Arab Muslim community.

Recent Islamic history is not marked by an abundance of internationally popular and revered figures. Michael Scheuer argues that while the average Muslim will not be found in the streets protesting for Osama bin Laden, they still have incredible respect for his veracity to challenge the position of the United States. Scheuer argues that bin Laden may be the most respected, loved, charismatic figure of the last 150 years of Islamic history.⁷⁰ If this is indeed the case and more Muslims eventually embrace bin Laden's *jihād* or just silently support it, then the subsystem dominance of the international system will intensify. As Benjamin and Simon suggest, "Islamists may not control parliaments or government palaces, but they have occupied the popular imagination."⁷¹

The United States Cannot Go it Alone

During the Cold War the United States built a great alliance to confront the Soviet Union and its allies. The alliance was available to support the policies and campaigns of the United States, because the U.S. was the international system's dominant actor (defined by the dominance of power), however the U.S. could have, at any time, acted alone to counter Soviet actions if required by the circumstances. Today this is not the case.

Today's international system is dominated and driven by less dominant actors—the *jihād* insurgents. While the United States claims and has demonstrated that it is willing to confront the insurgents alone if necessary, this is not a recipe for success. In a subsystem dominated international environment concerted effort by multiple actors are required to change the system. Moreover, the U.S. insistence that "you are either completely with us or against us" leaves little middle ground for policy debate and positions amongst allies. U.S. policies and actions which ignored the concerns of its traditional European allies eventually alienated them. It is a sad state of affairs for the United States when fear of a protest by members of parliament negates an address by President Bush or when he is met by widespread protests when he visits his northern neighbor, Canada. Such a reaction to the President in the lands of two traditional U.S. friends—one being America's most prominent supporter in the GWOT—suggests a very troubling environment for U.S. action and maneuver. Going it alone will not suffice.

The *jihād*ists envision a conflict consisting of battles and isolated engagements spread over time and space. While traditional campaigns against a much weaker foe would usually allow the U.S. to go it alone, the nature of its enemy in the GWOT requires a concerted effort by a broad coalition. As suggested by the 9-11 Commission Report, the United States needs to take the lead role in a broad coalition to stop Islamic terrorists and insurgents.⁷²

Easy Solutions and Initial Impulses are Probably Wrong

During the Cold War the United States had a pronounced enemy that U.S. policy makers came to know well. A large percentage of the U.S. national security infrastructure during this period was devoted to exclusively analyzing every aspect of the USSR and its intentions. The U.S. and the USSR, while extremely powerful, both had a lot to lose in a superpower conflict. The potential for massive losses resulting from any head-to-head conflict encouraged each to deter the other. In many respects an eerie tranquility was realized as the two super powers maneuvered the international system. Communications and interactions between the U.S. and USSR became routinized and this steady state defined the international system equilibrium. While surprises and crises (i.e., disturbances

to the routine or equilibrium) surely occurred during the Cold War period such events were the exception rather than the rule of this system dominated system.

During the Cold War, decision makers had a clear range of alternative policies. The nature of the Cold War made policy prescriptions and actions more obvious. This is surely not the case in the present GWOT dominated international present system, where U.S. policies cannot only alienate moderate Muslims but also traditional friends and allies.

Today's system is characterized by threats that can emerge very quickly. These threats are anything but routine. In addition, the *ihadists* have proven themselves to be extremely clever. This, of course, was tragically witnessed on 9-11 when al Qaeda employed airplanes as missiles, a threat NORAD had no protocols to address.⁷³

The *ihadist* threat, unlike the Cold War Soviet threat, is also relatively vague. The threat is not characterized by national boundaries nor can it be easily bargained or negotiated with. Such a vague and amorphous threat can result in vague goals towards it. And vague goals are often defined by initial impulses and easy solutions rather than policies informed by thorough analysis. Moreover, such goals and respective policies aimed at their realization are often misguided. For example, the notion that Iraqi democracy will domino across the entire Middle East, or that the U.S. must differentiate between the "Old Europe" and "New Europe," or that Saddam Hussein was intimately involved in 9-11, or that there was an explicit link between Iraq and al Qaeda⁷⁴ are all impulses that might sound good and reinforce American desires, but ultimately represent simple reductionist responses to complex problems.

Time Isn't Necessarily on our Side

The patience of al Qaeda as well as other *ihadists* is possibly the most problematic dimension of the threat posed to the United States. The al Qaeda training manual states that:

[The member] should have plenty of patience for [enduring] afflictions if he is overcome by the enemies. He should not abandon this great path and sell himself and his religion to the enemies for his freedom. He should be patient in performing the work, even if it lasts a long time.⁷⁵

The GWOT unfortunately has the potential to last well beyond our children's lifetime and fought in a global arena that increasingly involves the U.S. homeland. The JOC-DTO suggests that the GWOT will last "decades or generations."⁷⁶

Is the United States prepared for decades of violent warfare spread over the entire globe and involving its homeland? Will the U.S. public draw war weary as the *ihadists* continue their war of attrition?

A recent Washington Post-ABC News poll suggests that there is deep and growing skepticism concerning the war in Iraq.⁷⁷ This poll reveals a solid majority of U.S. citizens believing that the war is a "mistake" and has led 56% of those polled to conclude that the conflict given the associated human and financial costs is "not worth fighting."⁷⁸

Conclusions

The United States is only starting to recognize the true nature of the *ihadist* threat and its wider implications for strategy and policy. The principal argument of this paper is that the *ihadist* ideology as manifested by bin Laden really reflects the continuing and growing salience of international subsystem dynamics—a system with characteristics that do not

respect the primacy of U.S. power, position or national interests. Before addressing the strategic challenge and taking steps to address the threat, the United States must come to terms with the primacy of subsystem dynamics and intellectually divorce itself from the ideas of bi- and uni-polarity that have been used as the basis to assert U.S. hegemony.

While roundly derided in the fields of international relations theory, Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* correctly identified the growing impact that subsystem dynamics would play in the international system. Bounding these dynamics with concepts such as "culture" and "religion" left Huntington open to understandable attacks due to the inherent difficulty of defining these concepts—not to mention the politically charged nature of his argument. These issues miss the broader point of his argument, which we believe has been borne out in events throughout the 1990s to today's environment. Subsystem dynamics, driven by a variety of different forces, are the defining feature of the international environment.

A neo-realist view of the world asserting that the United States must assume the mantle of sheriff or policeman in the absence of effective international institutions is doomed to failure. Institutions designed around assumptions of hegemony and unipolarity remain fundamentally mismatched to the broader environment. The temporal and spatial nature of the global *jihad* makes it virtually impossible for the U.S. to tackle the enemy alone. The U.S. does not have the forces, organization, equipment and it is doubtful that the U.S. public has the will to commit the resources that would be necessary to conduct a long and dispersed conflict. The limits of U.S. resources are vividly on display in Iraq.

Even when the *jihad* or insurgency is confined to a bounded space such as Iraq the strains on U.S. resources and strategy are obvious. While the attacks on the insurgent stronghold in Fallujah appeared successful, the insurgents also seem to have successfully dispersed, forcing U.S. forces into more reactive focused raids in a variety of other cities. The response of the insurgents to the Fallujah attacks was to raise the level of violence, which in turn has led to calls for more troops.⁷⁹

The thinking expressed in SOCOM's draft guidance seems in line with Rumsfeld's own intuitive thinking. Both actors seem to realize the incongruity between the threat of the *jihadists* and DoD's organizational structures. Both actors are on the right track but face formidable obstacles in tackling the daunting organizational and operational challenges facing the Defense Department. The mature organizational structures within the Defense Department remain locked in organizational behavior that is devoted to self-preservation as a defining principle. These organizations rhetorically embrace the ideas of change, but usually "wait out" the leadership calling for fundamental structural change. The "values" of the system remain tied to platform driven planning and budgeting and the endless bureaucratic battles for resources. But perhaps their most daunting challenge remains the most intractable one: convincing the political leadership to embrace the need to fundamentally reorient the nation's organizational structures to meet the demands of subsystem primacy. The stakes of the issue are enormous: if the U.S. fails to address the intellectual and organizational challenges then they may win battles on the GWOT, but will never win the wider war.

Notes

1. A way to operationalize this definition is to think of the international system as a "super system," nation states as the "system" and non-state forces as "sub systems." For Systems Theory, see: J.G. Miller, *Living Systems* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978); Ludwig von Bertalanffy *General System Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 1968); Boulding, K. "General System Theory—The Skeleton

of Science.” *General Systems* (Yearbook of the Society for the Advancement of General Systems Theory, 1956). For an introduction to general system in the social sciences, see: Walter Buckley, *Sociology and Modern Systems Theory*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

For systems theory applied specifically to international relations see: Deutsch K. W., *The Nerves of Government: Models of Communication and Control* (New York: Free Press, 1963); Charles A. McClelland, *Theory and the International System* (New York, Macmillian, 1966); Kenneth Boulding, *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory*, (New York: Harper, 1962); Morton A. Kaplan, *System and Process in International Politics*, (New York: J. Wiley, 1957). For a discussion of the pros and cons of the use of systems theory as a “tool for concept formulation” for the study of international relations see: Mathias Albert, “Observing World Politics. Luhmann’s Systems Theory of Society and International Relations”. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2.

2. Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations” *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, vol. 72, no. 3, pp. 28–50.

3. Homer-Dixon, Thomas. “On the Threshold: Environmental Changes as Causes of Acute Conflict.” *International Security*, vol. 16, no. 2 (Fall 1991) pp. 76–116. Homer-Dixon; Also see Michael Klare, *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict* (Henry Holt, 2001).

4. See Robert Kaplan’s *Warrior Politics: Why Leadership Demands a Pagan Ethos*, Random House 2002, 198 pp.

5. Lars-Erik Cederman, *Emergent Actors in World Politics*, (Princeton University Press, 1997), 258 pp.

6. See Daniel Byman, “Measuring the War on Terrorism: A First Appraisal,” *Current History*, December 2003, vol. 102, issue 668. Byman notes “As such, al Qaeda is probably best defined as a religiously inspired, global insurgent movement that often uses terrorist tactics.” Also see, “Anonymous” *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terrorism*, (Brassey, 2004) for a similar argument.

7. Jeffery Record, *Bounding the Global War on Terrorism*, (U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA, December 2003).

8. Estimates for the F-22 drawn from *Tactical Aircraft: Changing Conditions Drive Need for New Business Case*, General Accounting Office, Washington, DC, GAO Report-04-391.

9. For a similar methodology and approach to the research question, see: Anonymous, *Through Our Enemies’ Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America*, (Washington, DC, Brasseys, 2003).

10. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (The White House, Washington, DC, September 2002).

11. *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, (The White House, Washington, DC, February 2003), pp. 15–18.

12. See these objectives as listed by the State Department’s Counterterrorism Office at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/>.

13. *National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2004: A Strategy for Today; A Vision for Tomorrow*, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Department of Defense, Washington, DC, May 13, 2004.

14. Colin Gray, *The Sheriff: America’s Defense of the New World Order*, (University Press of Kentucky, March 2004), 195 pp.

15. *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Department of Defense, (Washington DC, September 30, 2001), p. 20.

16. *National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2004: A Strategy for Today a Vision for Tomorrow*, op. cit., p. 10.

17. Speech as reprinted in George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, (New York, Knopf, 1998) p. 370.

18. George W. Bush, Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, September 20, 2001. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-.html> (accessed November 15, 2004).

19. National Security Strategy Report, foreword as signed by President Bush.
20. Malise Ruthven, *A Fury for God: The Islamicist Attack on America*, (London: Granta Books, 2002), p. 246.
21. Dr. Mohammed Abd-al-Halim Umar, "The United States has Begun its War Against Islam," *Lailatalgdr* (internet version), March 21, 2002.
22. *Inside the Pentagon*, 28 October 2004.
23. *The 9-11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, (W.W. Norton and Co, 2004).
24. *Draft Joint Operational Concept for Defeating Terrorist Organizations (JOC-DTO)* Nov 14, 04, Special Operations Command, Tampa, FL. We will refer to this document as the JOC-DTO.
25. Bin Laden's message appeals mostly to Arab Sunni Muslims.
26. This argument here is similar to the controversial thesis developed by Michael Scheuer, a 22-year veteran of the CIA and once head of the agency's Osama bin Laden Unit and published in Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terrorism*, (Washington, DC, Brassey's, 2004). Also see: Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror: Radical Islam's War Against America*, (Random House, 2003).
27. *JOC-DTO*, November 14, 2004, pp. 7.
28. For example see his, "Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," Originally published in *Al Quds Al Arabi*, August, 1996 and redistributed in 1998.
29. Muslim *jihadists* and theocrats do desire the elimination of some of the western "liberties" because such are perceived as sin and wickedness such as alcohol, illicit sex, promiscuity on T.V. and in movies, magazines, etc.
30. Bin Laden desires the establishment of Muslim theocracy/theocracies. In that sense, he is against Western concepts of democracy, especially in traditionally Muslim held regions. But he and other Muslim theocrats are not confined to commonly recognized borders. The establishment of Muslim theocracy anywhere and everywhere is a goal.
31. Muslim theocrats hate both U.S. actions and those western values that are perceived as sin/wickedness. From a Muslim theocrat's perspective there is no separation between values or beliefs and actions. A person's or society's values or beliefs guide its actions. If the values or beliefs are wrong or wicked then the actions will be wrong or wicked.
32. According to al Qaeda the following Muslim leaders are considered apostate: Sadat, Hosni Mubarak, Gadafi, Hafez Assad, Saleh, and Fahed. See: *The Al Qaeda Training Manual*, UndatedUK/BM-8 Translation. (The manual was located by the Manchester (England) Metropolitan Police during a search of an *al Qaeda* member's home. The manual was found in a computer file described as "the military series" related to the "Declaration of Jihad.")
33. Examples cited by bin Laden and other *Jihadists* include: Hindu India in Kashmir; Catholic Filipinos in Mindanao; Orthodox Christian Russians in Chechnya; Uzbek ex-communists in Uzbekistan; Chinese communists in Xinjiang Province; Apostate al-Sauds in Arabian Peninsula Israeli Jews in Palestine.
34. See: Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris*. Op. cit.
35. The importance of U.S. Middle Eastern policy promoted over the last 30 years to the present GWOT cannot be overstated. Pakistani President Musharraf, for example has recently argued that the United States must more aggressively press for resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which "is the source of all problems". He has argued that the resolution of this very difficult and long-standing problem is key to defusing tensions in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Islamic world (*Washington Post*, December 5, 2004, pg. A22).
36. Apostate and corrupt Islamic Governments cited by *jihadists* include: Kuwait; The UAE; Egypt; Jordan; Pakistan; and Saudi Arabia.
37. *The 9-11 Commission Report*, p. 362. Op. cit.
38. *JOC-DTO*: 9 refers to the conflict as a "defensive *jihad* designed to protect Islam from Western attack."

39. The Sunnah is the sayings and traditions of the prophet Mohammed.
40. Joint Publication 1-02, *DoD Dictionary of Military Terms*. (US Department of Defense, 2004).
41. *JOC-DTO*, pp. 8–9.
42. Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*, (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), p. 17.
43. There is also a public diplomacy campaign not directed at the Muslim theocrats but at the “apostate” governments and “apostate” Muslims. It is designed to keep the “apostates” from joining the Muslim theocrats hence, diminishing the support to and size of the Muslim theocratic movements.
44. See: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, Memo on the *Global War on Terrorism* published in U.S. Today On-Line <http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/executive/rumsfeld-memo.htm> (accessed 10/21/2003).
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*
47. Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, *Transformation Planning Guidance*, April 2003.
48. Secretary Rumsfeld was recently quoted: “The enemy is operating in smaller cells with every bit as lethal capabilities as we have, but they can turn on a dime. . . . We’ve got to find ways to be much swifter and more adept” at everything from attacking enemy fighters to spending money to build local security forces and reconstruction projects. Quoted in Greg Jaffe, “Rumsfeld’s Gaze is Trained Beyond Iraq,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 9, 2004, p. 4.
49. Bin Laden’s Letter to America, 2002.
50. *The Al Qaeda Training Manual*, UndatedUK/BM-8 Translation. (The manual was located by the Manchester (England) Metropolitan Police during a search of an *al Qaeda* member’s home. The manual was found in a computer file described as “the military series” related to the “Declaration of Jihad.”)
51. *Zakat*—The seriousness of *Zakat*, the obligatory charity, to a Muslim is reflected in *Hadith Zakat*: Allah’s Apostle said, “Whoever is made wealthy by Allah and does not pay the Zakat of his wealth, then on the Day of Resurrection his wealth will be made like a baldheaded poisonous male snake with two black spots over the eyes. The snake will encircle his neck and bite his cheeks and say, ‘I am your wealth, I am your treasure.’ ” Then the Prophet recited the holy verses: “And let not those who covetously withhold of that which Allah has bestowed on them of His Bounty (Wealth) think that it is good for them (and so they do not pay the obligatory Zakat). Nay, it will be worse for them; the things which they covetously withheld shall be tied to their necks like a collar on the Day of Resurrection. And to Allah belongs the heritage of the heavens and the earth; and Allah is Well Acquainted with all that you do.” (3:180) [Hadith Vol 2:#486] as quoted <http://www.road-to-heaven.com/fr15.htm> (accessed December 20, 2004).
52. *The Al-Qaeda Training Manual*, UndatedUK/BM-8 Translation, op. cit.
53. A principal recommendation of the 9-11 Report was negotiations with this enemy are useless.
54. Jessica Stern compares and draws parallels of this uncompromising, “true belief” of the *jihadi* to the abortion clinic bombers in the United States. See: Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*, (Harper Collins, 2003).
55. *JOC-DTO*, p. 18, op. cit.
56. *Wall Street Journal*, November 8, 2004.
57. *The 9-11 Commission Report*, pg. 364, op. cit.
58. *Washington Post*, December 6, 2004, p. A18.
59. See, *The 9-11 Commission Report*, op. cit.
60. *JCO-DTO*, p. 9.
61. *JOC-DTO*, p. 7.
62. See Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terrorism*. Op. cit.

63. See Brian Jenkins, *The Operational Code of the Jihadists*, A Briefing Prepared for the Army Defense Science Board, April 1, 2004.
64. United Press International, "Iraqi Insurgents Outnumber U.S. Forces," January 4, 2005. The report quotes the director of Iraq's newly created Intelligence Service, Gen Muhammad Abdullah Shawani on these estimates. The number of so-called "jihadists" within this population is believed to number below 1,000.
65. See Brian Jenkins, *The Operational Code of the Jihadists*. Op. cit.
66. *The 9-11 Commission Report*, p. 379.
67. *Washington Post*, December 6, 2004, p. A18.
68. Bob Woodward, *Bush at War*, (Simon and Schuster, 2002), pp. 58–59.
69. For polling data see: James Zogby, *What Arabs Think: Values, Beliefs, and Concerns*, (Zogby International, 2002). For fear of U.S. attacks see: Pew Global Attitudes Project Report, *Views of a Changing World*: June 2003 (Pew Research Center, 2003), p. 2.
70. *Imperial Hubris*, pp. 103–105, 118–126, op. cit.
71. Benjamin and Simon, Op. Cit. p. 173.
72. See *The 9-11 Commission Report*. Op. cit.
73. Ibid.
74. For a discussion of: President Bush's view that Saddam was connected to 9-11 or Secretary Rumsfeld's commitment to hitting Hussein at the same time as Bin Ladin or Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz view that Iraq was the source of the GWOT problem or that General Tommy Franks' concern about a connection between Iraq and Al-Qaeda, see: Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* or the *9-11 Commission Report*. Op. cit.
75. *Al Qaeda Training Manual*, UK/BM-16.
76. *JCO-DTO*, Nov 14, 2004, p. 12.
77. *Washington Post*, December 21, 2004, A4.
78. Ibid.
79. *Washington Post*, December 6, 2004, pp. A1 and A28.