Picking your fights: a strategic/operational approach to transnational terrorism

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Therefore, to gain a hundred victories in a hundred battles is not the highest excellence;

to subjugate the enemy's army without doing battle is the highest of excellence.

Therefore, the best warfare strategy is to attack the enemy's plans, next is to attack alliances, next is to attack the army, and the worst is to attack a walled city.

Sunzi

Outline

- Definitions
- A little history -- National Strategy for Combating Terrorism 2003/2006
- European Counter-terrorism strategy
- Structural Conditions vs. "political process"
- Ending terrorism
  - Cronin
  - RAND
  - SOF and the long war
- Conclusions and Observations

Definitions

- Terrorism

- Operational art -- The employment of military forces to attain strategic and/or operational objectives through the design, organization, integration, and conduct of strategies, campaigns, major operations, and battles.

2003 Objectives

- Victory in the War Against Terror (by reducing the scope and capabilities of terrorists)
- Defeat Terrorists and Their Organizations
- Deny Sponsorship, Support, and Sanctuary to Terrorists
- Diminish the Underlying Conditions that Terrorists Seek to Exploit
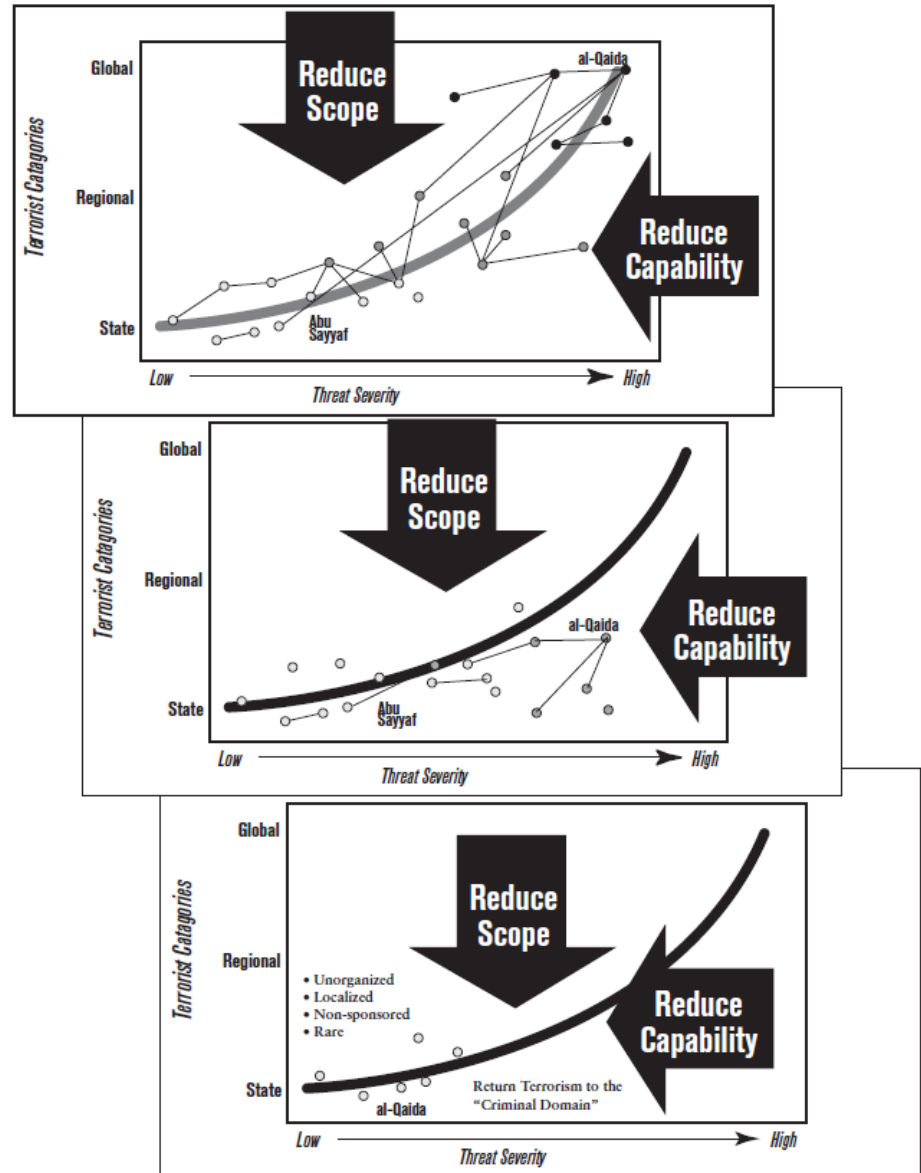- Defend US Citizens and Interests at Home and Abroad

OPERATIONALIZING THE STRATEGY

Figure 3

DESIRED ENDSTATE

2006 Objectives

- Advance Effective Democracy (by defeating violent extremism and creating a global environment inhospitable to violent extremists)
- Prevent Attacks by Terrorist Networks
- Deny WMD to Rogue States and Terrorist Allies Who Seek To Use Them
- Deny Terrorists the Support and Sanctuary of Rogue States
- Deny Terrorists Control of Any Nation They Would Use as a Base and Launching Pad for Terror

EU Counterterrorism strategy

- General framework of EU action in the field of counter-terrorism isoutlined in the European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy,adopted by the European Council in December 2005.
- The strategy covers four strands of work:
  - to prevent;
  - to protect;
  - to pursue;
  - to respond.
- The strategy describes the added value of the EU as follows:
  - Strengthening national capabilities
  - Facilitating European cooperation
  - Developing collective capability
  - Promoting international partnership

Comments on Approaches so far

- More tactical than strategic/operational
- More responsive than proactive
- More structural than procedural
- More node than network
- No geography
- No history
- Campaigns?

Theoretical approaches

- Structural – onset – Collier-Hoeffler
  – Greed
  – Grievance
- Process – duration -- Social movement theory
  – Resources
  – Political Opportunity
  – Framing

Studies on ending terrorism

- Cronin
- RAND
- SOF and the long war

Cronin – case studies: process tracing

- Decapitation: Catching or killing a leader
- Negotiations: Transition toward a Legitimate Political Process
- Success: Achieving success
- Failure: Imploding, Provoking a Backlash or Becoming Marginalized
- Repression: Crushing Terrorism with Force
- Reorientation: Transitioning to another Modus Operandi

Cronin recommendations for dealing with al Qaida

- Too late for decap
- Divide and rule through negotiations
- Objectives unlikely to be met
- Failure thru implosion
  - Now multigenerational
  - Internal divisiveness
  - Loss of operational control [Zawahiri-Zarqawi]
  - Offer to exit [cooption]
- Undermine popular support [Zawahiri in Egypt]
- Limitations of repression, especially by democracy
- Reorientation [criminality and the unintended consequences of cutting off finances; islamism vs. nationalism]
- Main effort to counter – differentiation and sustain action – requires operational approach not tactics

How terrorist groups end [RAND]

- Transition to the political process [43%]
- Policing [40%]
- Achieved goals [10%]
- Military action [7%]
- There is no statistical correlation between the duration of a terrorist group and ideological motivation, economic conditions, regime type, or the breadth of terrorist goals. But there appears to be some correlation between the size of a terrorist group and duration: Larger groups tend to last longer than smaller groups.

RAND regression predicting terrorist group success

Table C.2
All Explanatory Variables

Term	Coefficient	Standard Error	p	95% CI of Coefficient	
				Low	High
Intercept	2.3689	0.5786	<0.0001	1.2326	3.5052
Income	0.0100	0.1168	0.9320	−0.2193	0.2393
Freedom	0.2939	0.1589	0.0647	−0.0180	0.6058
Peak size	2.1004	0.1288	<0.0001	1.8474	2.3534
Is left-wing	0.6129	0.4550	0.1785	−0.2806	1.5064
Is nationalist	1.2417	0.4537	0.0064	0.3508	2.1327
Is religious	1.2648	0.4955	0.0109	0.2918	2.2377
Breadth	−0.1333	0.1173	0.2562	−0.3636	0.0970

NOTE: R^2 is 0.34. Adjusted R^2 is 0.33. Standard error is 2.6574.

RAND Recommendations for dealing with al Qaida

- No political accommodation
- policing and intelligence should be the backbone of U.S. efforts
- military force, though not necessarily U.S. soldiers, may be a necessary instrument when al Qa'ida is involved in an insurgency
- ending the notion of a war on terrorism and replacing it with such concepts as counterterrorism

CSBA -- Recommendations for SOF

- Defeating Salafi-Takfiri and Khomeinist terrorist groups could require SOF to:

- Conduct proactive, sustained manhunting and disruption operations globally

- Build partner capacity in relevant ground, air and maritime capabilities on a steady-state basis

- Generate persistent surveillance and strike coverage over ungoverned areas and littorals globally

- Employ unconventional warfare against state sponsors of terrorism and transnational terrorist groups

Global Application of Strategy

Ongoing Missions

- Deny Safe Havens
- Build Capacity
- Amplify Moderates
- Improve Governance
- Secure WMD
- Attack Terrorists
- Develop Partnerships
- Economic Development
- Educate & Train

Europe

Proliferation Security Initiative

Partnership Development

Security Cooperation

Middle East

Security Operations

Economic, Political Development

Africa

Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Initiative

Horn of Africa JTF

South East Asia

Security Cooperation Programs

Humanitarian Operations

CT Fellowships

While actions are ongoing, long term efforts are required

National Strategic Framework for the GWOT

"We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans and confront the worst threats before they emerge. In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action."
                                                                                    President George W. Bush

Ends

Strategic Aims:
- Defeat violent extremism as a threat to our way of life as a free and open society, and
- Create a global environment inhospitable to violent extremists and all who support them

Ways

Protect and defend the Homeland and U.S. interests abroad

Attack terrorists and their capacity to operate effectively at home and abroad

Support mainstream Muslim efforts to reject violent extremism

Expand foreign partnerships and partnership capacity

Strengthen our capacity to prevent terrorist acquisition and use of WMD

Institutionalize domestically and internationally the War on Terror
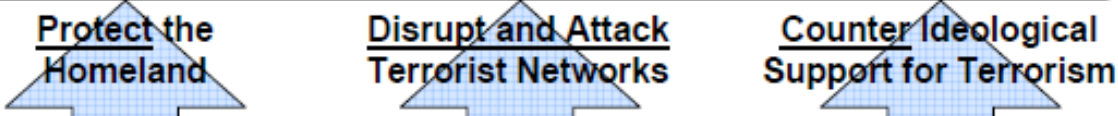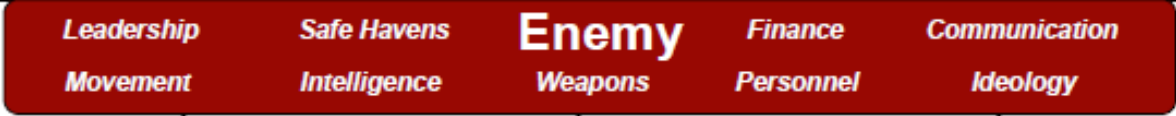
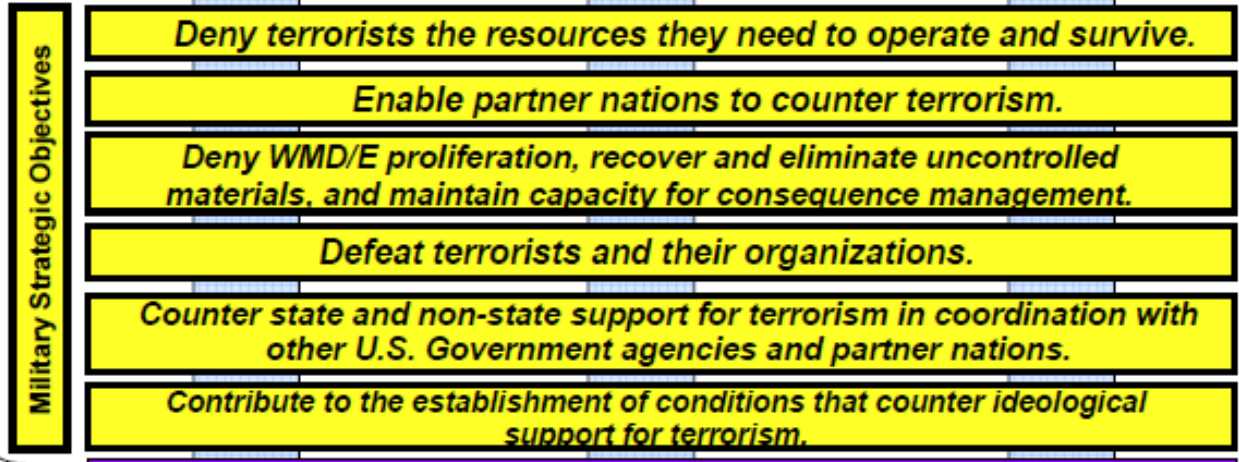**Means**

Instruments of National Power

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National Military Strategic Plan for the WOT

Ends — **Strategic Goal:** Preserve and promote the way of life of free and open societies based on the rule of law, defeat terrorist extremism as a threat to our way of life, and create a global environment inhospitable to terrorist extremists.

Leadership	Safe Havens	**Enemy**	Finance	Communication
Movement	Intelligence	Weapons	Personnel	Ideology

Protect the Homeland   **Disrupt and Attack Terrorist Networks**   **Counter Ideological Support for Terrorism**

Ways — **Military Strategic Objectives**

- Deny terrorists the resources they need to operate and survive.
- Enable partner nations to counter terrorism.
- Deny WMD/E proliferation, recover and eliminate uncontrolled materials, and maintain capacity for consequence management.
- Defeat terrorists and their organizations.
- Counter state and non-state support for terrorism in coordination with other U.S. Government agencies and partner nations.
- Contribute to the establishment of conditions that counter ideological support for terrorism.

Means — **Combatant Commands, Services, and Combat Support Agencies**

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Conclusions and Observations

- Conventional wisdom probably wrong
  - No hearts and minds
  - No redressing grievances
  - No counter-ideology
- Methodologically defeating terrorism more about process than changing structural conditions
- Much more about police than the military
- Need to bring geography back in
- No sense of an ongoing campaign
- US not well organized to conduct campaign [role of police]
- Best approach is to undermine transnational terrorists strategy [plans]

NIGERIA
ETHNIC GROUPS