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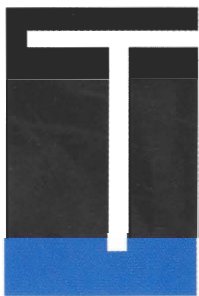
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13th Year

IACSP

2004
Vol. 10. No 4

www.iacsp.com

COUNTERING POLITICAL ISLAM

William Gawthrop

This article proposes strategic considerations for addressing political Islam. A long pattern of attacks involving Islamic elements against the West have been variously interpreted as actions by criminals and crazies and, in the main, we have used a law enforcement approach for addressing the issue. This initial problem definition and subsequent reliance on the law enforcement approach, combined with the blinding effects of political correctness, masks the true nature of the problem before us. The problem is political Islam.

Beginning in the late 1960s, and continuing through the 1990s, a variety of dissident groups conducting seemingly unrelated train and plane hijackings, bank robberies, bombings, kidnappings , and assassinations, gave rise to the impression that we were confronted by "criminals, crazies and crusaders." That mind set contributed to a serious underestimation of Islamic based "terrorists" as a different kind of threat. They are neither criminals, crazies, crusaders…nor terrorists. We have mis-defined the problem.

Islamic based attacks are the manifestation of a larger phenomenon with which American, its media, military, and political establishment are not readily able to come to grips. It is a religious war with political and ideological dimensions. The problem of taking the next step remains: developing a counter strategy to political Islam.

Problem Identification

The first step in developing a strategy is to accurately define the basic, underlying, problem because the later process of identifying an objective and end state should refer back to, and favorably resolve on a permanent basis, the underlying problem.[1]

The problem is not terrorism any more than the problem December 7th, 1941, was "Surprise Attack." The issue in the 1940's was not "Surprise Attack" or "Blitzkrieg". Neither was it Japan or Germany for they are states animated only by men. The real issue was the philosophies of the men in leadership positions in Japan and Germany. Terrorism, like surprise attack and blitzkrieg, is simply another form of attack. The underlying philosophy, not the method of attack, is at issue.

Islam is simultaneously a religion, a political philosophy, and schools of law. American policy planners, strategists, journalists and citizenry are fixated on the religious aspects of Islam to the degree that we find it difficult to organize a coherent and cohesive strategic defense against its ideology. It is not palatable to think of religious Islam as an enemy and it is seemingly inconsistent with our values to wage war on a religion. It is, however,

permissible to defend against an ideological threat and Islam presents such a threat.

Aggressive Islam

With regard to expansion, Islam is different from the Judaic and Catholic (Christian) religions. Neither Judaism nor Christianity advocates assertion or expansion by force. Islam does. And, when viewed from the context of Just War traditions, we find that the Judaic, Christian, and Realist traditions of Just War are passive-defensive while Islam is aggressive-offensive. It's strategic posture is forward leaning.

Islam's Grand Strategy

This aggressive-offensive orientation is accompanied by an identifiable grand strategy. Even though there are multiple sects, legal traditions and other variations within Islam, the active elements within Islam are pursuing a previously stated grand strategy laid down by a commonly accepted leader. Muhammad, both in his capacity as a religious and military leader, established the strategic objective of political (as well as religious) emperium and he left behind a war fighting doctrine articulated in the Koran[2], elaborated on in the Hadiths[3], codified in Islamic Law[4], and reinforced by current interpretations in the modern era[5] What is unique from a Western standpoint is the provisioning in Islam

for autonomous and decentralized execution as well as some rather remarkable values and practices insulating Islam from external penetration.[6] This is what confuses and confounds defensive planners.

Operational Levels of Islamic strategic attack

The current resistance being experienced in Iraq, the patterns of Islamic based slavery against Christians and other Non-Muslims in Sudan and Mauritania, the "Arab-Israeli Conflict", the "Israeli-Palestinian" problem, the operations being waged against the United States and the American people by Al-Qaida, the pronouncements of the October 2003 Islamic Congress held in Malaysia condemning Judaism, and the infiltration of, for example, the Balkans by Saudi and Iranian variants of Islam, as well as the world wide response to the call of Jihad against the United States are all distinct, Operational Level, expressions of a grand strategy. Autonomous *and* decentralized execution is destabilizing our ability to respond in an effective manner. There is a disturbing inability to appreciate the strategic implications of these decentralized attacks.

Tactical Levels of Islamic strategic attack

A diligent review of seeming violations of Geneva Conventions and normally accepted rules of warfare reveals that Islamic fighters are behaving within the context of their just war principles, dictates of the Koran and pertinent parts of Islamic Tradition, and Islamic Law. Our dismissal of these actions as "criminal" or blaming them on "foreigners" is a strategic failure to both understand the nature of the threat and adjust our response accordingly. The strategic threat is political Islam.

Doctrinal Enablers

There are at least two critical doctrinal enablers that facilitate the execution of this strategy: Jihad and Zakat.

Jihad
One operational definition of Jihad, as previously discussed in other articles and far greater detail, is the duty to defend Islam. In a Defensive War[7], Muslims assume a personal obligation to fight Jihad in defense of Islam. In February 1998, and in a series of public declarations since, bin Laden has declared that an Islamic defensive war is being fought against the United States. A call to arms has been issued, the militia is being raised, and it is being funded, in part, by Zakat.

Zakat
Zakat, not to be confused with foreign government

All the elements of a hostile grand strategy, accompanied by a supporting doctrine, a capable militia, and financial resources, are both in place and in motion.

subsidies, is generally thought to be simply a religiously obligatory alms giving to the poor. However, it also serves as a funding source for lodgment operations and combat, combat support, and combat service support operations. It is obligatory to distribute zakat to eight categories of recipients, two of which facilitate war fighting.[8] The eight categories of recipients are: the poor, those short of money, Zakat workers, those whose hearts are to be reconciled, those purchasing their freedom, those in debt, those fighting for Allah, and travelers needing money. The two war fighting categories are "those whose hearts are to be reconciled" and "those fighting for Allah."

"Those whose hearts are to be reconciled" receive funds to sustain them while they either convert to Islam, require an operating budget to ensure the propagation of the faith during the initial phases of establishment, or to shore up weak or fledgling institutions needing economic support. This category also includes payments to individuals, persons of influence whose peers may be expected to enter Islam, or "heads of a people who fight an enemy for Islam at considerable expense and trouble to themselves."[9]

"Those fighting for Allah" includes those participating in Jihad. Zakat may be paid to "those engaged in Islamic military operations for whom no salary has been allotted in the army roster" and they may be "given enough to suffice them for the operation even if affluent; of weapons, mounts, clothing, expenses, for the duration of the journey, round trip and the time they spend there."[10] Current interpretation and practice has been to provide financial assistance to the families of persons on jihad.

All the elements of a hostile grand strategy, accompanied by a supporting doctrine, a capable militia, and financial resources, are both in place and in motion.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR COUNTER STRATEGY

Defining the Threat

The most difficult part of developing a counter strategy is assessing Islam as a political, ideological, and military enemy. Once that psychological bridge as been crossed, the development of a counter strategy can proceed with a degree of celerity. The core issue is Islam as a political and ideological threat. The preferred levers of national power employed in response to this threat should be Diplomatic and Information.

First Amendment considerations

While there are very real military and ideological threats emanating from Islam that lend themselves to standard military

and ideological analysis and response, exceptional care needs to be given to accommodating the Constitutional protections afforded to the religious portions of Islam. The task before strategic planners is to carefully address and, where possible, excise the ideological and military aspects of Islam that threaten American interests.

A Political Trinity

As a military and ideological entity, Islam is composed of three parts: its Holy texts (Koran, Hadiths and Sharia {Islamic Law}), the people, and the clerics (who provide political and military, as well as religious guidance.)

Centers of Gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities

Within each subset of the political trinity reside one or more targetable centers of gravity and critical vulnerabilities. These should be the focus of diplomatic and informational operational attack. Islamic scholars, the service colleges, and the national agencies can identify centers of gravity and critical vulnerabilities and recommend suitable themes and methodologies for addressing the political aspects of Islam.

Strategic Seams

The glue binding the elements of the political trinity together is "strategic culture". Colloquially expressed, strategic culture can be characterized as the love-hate relationship between two elements of the trinity. In Vietnam the strategic culture between the people and the military was comprised in part by two competing themes: the tradition of the citizen soldier versus an anti military bias. This example of a "love-hate" relationship was the seam split by North Vietnam in driving the Americans from the battlefield. The seams binding the political trinity in Islam are far from invulnerable but they do seem to be inexplicitly sacrosanct. Examine Islam's strategic seams, identify exploitable contradictions, and develop themes for diplomatic and information attack.

Developing a Strategic Strategy

Strategic Target and Goal

The strategic target is political Islam. The *strategic goal* should be the demilitarization of Islam and/or the inducement of an Islamic equivalent of a protestant reformation. There are a sufficient number of existing schisms, fissures, and sources of internal discord that facilitate a defensive strategy mak-

ing this a suitable, feasible, and acceptable goal. Any ideology created and propagated by men can be challenged and checked by men. The ultimate question is, "Which side has the greater resolve?"

Operational Targets

There are at least nine (9) identifiable operational level targets available for consideration: the centers of gravity for each of the three elements of the political trinity; the critical vulnerabilities for each of the three elements, and the three strategic seams binding the three elements together. A strategy addressing the political and military aspects of Islam is the preferred strategy to avoid First Amendment issues. If we find that religion is so intractably intertwined in the military and political aspects of Islam that defense becomes problematic, the strategic initiative will continue to reside with Islam.

Components of the Strategy

While the final form and content of any strategy is difficult to forecast, there are certain defensive components that should be considered.

Education of Policy Makers

A strategy has to have a common understanding of the true nature of the underlying problem. Presently we do not have that shared view. Senior administration officials who believe that "they hate freedom", that "they are criminals", and who "don't think" operational attacks "are emblematic of the Muslim world" do not have the necessary understanding of the true nature of the threat to orchestrate a strategic response. These comments indicate that the threat is ill defined and that intelligence is not adequately informing policy. An effective strategy presupposes two things: an accurate identification and understanding of the underlying problem, and that the desired endstate resolves the underlying problem. We have no strategic plan.

Education of the Public

This will be a critical and sensitive initiative. Invariably, we severely mismanage and under play this portion of our defensive strategies. Within our own strategic culture, there is a public mistrust of government information programs and even exceptional products such as the old *Soviet Military Power* series were met with media and public skepticism. In the black and white struggle of World War II, the *Why We Fight* series served our information interests well, as did the Army's *The Big Picture*, in the 1950s. However, the religious overtones of this ideological threat, when viewed against the backdrop of the First Amendment, poses a unique and sophisticated series of information problems. The

inherent credibility issues and level of sophistication necessary for conducting this portion of a defensive strategy will require the assistance of Madison Avenue.

Education of the Media

This is a critical component. The U.S. media is largely incapable of appreciating and/or maintaining for the long haul the focus on strategic issues. For a variety of financial, ideological and programming reasons, reporting will invariably highlight and critique the tactical issues potentially derailing public and international support for operational and strategic initiatives. The primary threat is the combined, attrititing effects of a relatively new phenomenon called "News, Chatter, and Therapy." Regardless of how well the strategic fight is going, the media makes its money and ratings by focusing on the tactical issues comprising operational and strategic pictures. Occasional tactical currents and eddies which sometimes run counter to the strategic thrust are often highlighted as indicators of operational and strategic failure. This triggers pundit comments (Chatter) amplifying tactical incidents into seemingly adverse operational trends.[11] Subsequently, talk shows, again focusing on the tactical, may, for example, highlight individual service family impacts thereby generating a tactically focused crescendo overshadowing the strategic objective. The public can withstand bad news. What they are vulnerable to is the Chinese water torture effects of successive battering by misfocused "Chatter and Therapy." This effectively splits the seams between the people and the government. Any grand strategy must not only address this particular phenomenon, but give it increasing attention in the information age. This is our critical vulnerability.

A Seven Step Process

The strategic intelligence considerations when preparing for war are embodied in a seven step process that facilitates strategy development. They are: problem identification, interests analysis, objective and end state identification, strategic self appraisal, a national power assessment of the adversary and his allies, strategy development, and the identification and elimination of the gaps between ends and means. This paper addresses three of those processes: problem identification, objective and end state, and strategy development. While opinions may vary on the objective and the strategy, our failure to understand and identify the underlying problem may cause us to fight the wrong war.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ARTICLE INFO

[1] See *Strategic Intelligence Considerations When Preparing for War,* Masters Thesis, Joint Military Intelligence College, Defense Intelligence Agency, Washington D.C., prepared by the author.

[2] The Quranic verse commanding jihad with a view toward a strategic end state is Surah 8-39: And fight them until there is no more *Fitnah* (disbelief and polytheism, i.e. worshiping others besides Allah) and the religion (worship) will all be for Allah Alone [in the whole world] But if they cease (worshiping others besides Allah), then certainly, Allah is All-Seer of what they do.

[3] From the Hadith, recorded by Sahih Al-Bukhari, Muhammad is quoted as saying: "I am commanded by Allah to go and fight all the people of the world until they confess there is no God but Allah, and I am his messenger, and to pray five times a day and to give alms. And if they do that, their blood will be spared from me. No Quranic revelation contradicted this final command of jihad, so it is still the goal of Islam today. Source: Mark A. Gabriel, *Islam and Terrorism: What the Quaran Really Teaches About Christianity, Violence and the Goals of Islamic Jihad,* (Charisma House, Lake Mary, FL, 2002) P.79

[4] Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law.*

[5] Two authoritative sources, one Shia and the other Sunni. Ayatollah Khomeini states: "Islam makes it incumbent on all adult males, provided they are not disabledor incapacitated, to prepare themselves for the conquest of (other) countries so that the writ of Islam is obeyed in every country in the world..... But those who study Islamic Holy War will understand why Islam wants to conquer the whole world.... Those who know nothing of Islam pretend that Islam counsels against war. Those (who say this) are witless. Islam says: Kill all the unbelievers just as they would kill you all! Does this mean that Muslims should sit back until they are devoured by (the unbelievers)? Islam says: Kill them (the non-Muslims), put them to the sword and scatter (their armies). Does this mean sitting back until (non-Muslims) overcome us? Islam says kill in the service of Allah those who *may* want to kill you! Does this mean we should surrender (to the enemy)? Islam says: What ever good there is exists thanks to the sword and in the shadow of the sword! People cannot be made obedient except by the sword. The sword is the key to Paradise, which can be opened only for the Holy Warriors!. There are hundreds of other (Qur'anic) psalms and Hadiths (sayings of the Prophet) urging Muslims to value war and to fight. Does all this mean that Islam is a religion that prevents men from waging war? I spit upon those foolish souls who make such a claim." Source: Amir Taheri, *Holy Terror: Inside the World of Islamic Terrorism* (Adler & Adler: 1987). 241-243, Mawlana Abdul Ala Mawdudi, Founder of the Pakistani Fundamentalist Movement states:Islam is not a normal religion like the other religions in the world, and Muslim nations are not like normal nations. Muslim nations are very special because they have a command from Allah to rule the entire world and to be over every nation in the world. Islam is a revolutionary faith that comes to destroy any government made by man. Islam doesn't look for a nation to be in a better condition than another nation. Islam doesn't care about the land or who owns the land. The goal of Islam is to rule the entire world and submit all of mankind to the faith of Islam. Any nation or power in this world that tries to get in the way of that goal, Islam will fight and destroy. In order for Islam to fulfill that goal, Islam can use every power available every way it can be used to bring worldwide revolution. This is jihad. Source: Mark A. Gabriel, *Islam and Terrorism: What the Quaran Really Teaches About Christianity, Violence and the Goals of Islamic Jihad,* (Charisma House, Lake Mary. FL. 2002) P. 81-84

[6] An excellent indicator of insulating practices that make investigations and inquiries into Islamic issues problematic are the legal tracts contained in Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri's, *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law.* See Book R (Holding One's Tounge), Chapter 2 (Slander), Chapter 8 (Lying), Chapter 10 (Giving a Misleading Impression), Chapter 23 (Asking About Another's Mistakes), Chapter 36 (Revealing a Secret). These provide startling guidance on the permissive behaviors designed to protect Islam from critical analysis.

[7] For an excellent, concise, strategic, overview of Islamic warfighting doctrine, see Chapter 4, War and Peace, in Bernard Lewis's *The Political Language of Islam.*

[8] Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri. Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law, Book H Chapter 8, Section 7

[9] Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law,* Book H, Chapter 8, Section 14

[10] Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law,* Book H, Chapter 8, Section 17

[11] For example, in November 2003, an Abrams tank in Baghdad received a mobility kill from a pencil thin plasma stream from a previously unencountered anti-tank weapon. Media reporting indicated that the "tank was blown off the road."