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Tentacles of Jihad: Targeting Transnational Support Networks

SHAWN BRIMLEY

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The 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* begins with a statement of strategic clarity: “The United States is a nation engaged in what will be a long war.”¹ From the suburbs and cities of North America and Europe, to the deserts, jungles, and villages of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, the “long war” is indeed a global one that has been and will continue to be a challenge for the professionals tasked with waging it. This war is characterized by its transnational nature, and although our military forces are heavily engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan, we must be vigilant in our appreciation of the breadth and depth of the strategic battleground. One gets a sense of the magnitude of the challenge by examining the service and support mechanisms of al Qaeda and its progeny.

The ways in which our enemies learn and adapt to pressure, as well as recruit followers and resupply combatants, offer important insights into the nature of the conflict. Using safe houses, smuggling rings, secured communications, and personnel who connect individuals to training and support networks, our enemies benefit from an interconnected global system that enables violent groups and handicaps intelligence and law enforcement agencies. The recent example of a Belgian woman traveling to Iraq to perform a suicide attack against a US military convoy is a case in point.² A convert to Islam, the woman typifies the growing threat facing Europe, America, and the nascent democracy in Iraq. Both the global jihadist movement and insurgent forces in Iraq utilize support networks that are best characterized by their mo-

bility, flexibility, and fluidity.³ Understanding and successfully targeting the service and support networks of terrorist groups is a prerequisite for success in the long war.

The Importance of Mobility and Support Networks

In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks, a disproportionate amount of effort was devoted to targeting and eliminating the sources of terrorist financing to the detriment of other, more critical support mechanisms.⁴ While eliminating the terrorist and insurgent leadership cells, waging the ideological war against the Salafist historical narrative, and addressing the root causes of radicalization are critical to success in the war on terrorism, these efforts must be supported by counterterrorism strategies that target the connective tissue between the enemy's strategic desires and their operational or tactical efforts. Transnational support networks are an overlapping feature of both the global jihadist movement and the Iraqi insurgency, and, if properly targeted, they constitute the Achilles' heel of these networks.⁵ Efforts at understanding, targeting, and eliminating transnational support networks should be a main effort of counterterrorism strategy. If successful, these efforts will greatly aid the United States and its allies in both prosecuting the war on terror and quelling the insurgency in Iraq.

The ability to train, move, and nourish combatants across vast distances in time and space is a constant feature of modern warfare. "War, with its numerous tentacles," according to Carl von Clausewitz, "prefers to suck nourishment from main roads, populous towns, fertile valleys traversed by broad rivers, and busy coastal areas."⁶ The ability of a commander to maneuver forces rapidly or clandestinely contributes significantly "to sustaining the initiative, to exploiting success, to preserving freedom of action, and to reducing vulnerability."⁷ Clausewitz believed that service and support capabilities in a protracted conflict were critical to success, writing, "Where a state of equilibrium has set in, in which troops move back and forth for years in the same province, subsistence is likely to become the critical concern. In that case, the quarter-master-general becomes the supreme commander, and the conduct of war consists of organizing the wagon trains."⁸ While one could certainly find proof of the validity of this insight throughout history, two

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modern examples are instructive. First, the ability of North Vietnam to sustain its massive war effort by utilizing a 10,000-mile, jungle-covered logistical pipeline greatly hampered the ability of American commanders to wage a successful counterinsurgency in the South.⁹ Second, the ability of Afghan and Arab insurgents to consistently cross the Afghan-Pakistan border during the Soviet occupation was a primary reason for the defeat of the Soviet Union in 1989.¹⁰ In each case, the strategic difficulty or political impossibility of expanding conventional conflict to neighboring states bequeathed significant advantages to insurgent forces.¹¹ Not only can mobility and support networks thrive in relatively secure areas, but neighboring states often contain large diaspora communities in which insurgents can easily disappear while regenerating supplies and raising personnel, as well as engaging in training and doctrinal innovation.

The ability of an enemy force to maintain secure areas from which to draw nourishment and reinforcements has proven to be especially vexing during insurgencies or terrorist campaigns. Virtually every great military philosopher has devoted a portion of his writing to the importance of service and support capabilities. “Plunder fertile country to supply the army with plentiful provisions,” Sun Tzu wrote. “Pay heed to nourishing the troops; do not unnecessarily fatigue them . . . conserve their strength. Make unfathomable plans for the movements of the army.”¹² Beyond statements of strategic importance, the 19th-century writings of Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini that deal with maneuver are instructive. Jomini was the first to conceive of the importance of “interior lines of operations”—routes that, if possessed, give a commander the ability “to concentrate the masses and maneuver with his whole force in a shorter period of time than it would require for the enemy to oppose to them a greater force.”¹³ Clausewitz would have agreed, as he too believed that “lines of communications” were critical “arteries” that sustained an army’s ability to mass force at decisive points. Telegraphing the difficulties that conventional forces would have when fighting irregular campaigns, Clausewitz wrote, “The position of lines of communication . . . [is a matter] of free choice only up to a certain point; their exact location is determined by the facts of geography.”¹⁴ The American experience with the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the Soviet difficulties in countering infiltration over the Hindu Kush are evidence of geography posing serious problems to countering insurgent lines of operations. Mobility and support networks that utilize effective lines of operation have been strategic problems for military commanders throughout history, and they will continue to be so, irrespective of the radical technological and doctrinal improvements in modern warfare.¹⁵

Modern transnational terrorism presents similar problems to intelligence and law-enforcement agencies. While geography certainly plays

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into the difficulties in tracking down figures like Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri in the mountainous Northwest Frontier Province in Pakistan, the process of globalization has created a newly difficult topography that terrorists can use to great benefit. The post-Cold War era has been defined by the increase in connectivity and linkages between states and among societies. Conveniences such as the internet, instant banking, cheap travel, and mobile phones greatly increase the global reach of terrorist organizations. From planning detailed and synchronous operations, to communicating intent and doctrine, and to the recruitment of new members, modern transnational terror groups gain strength and capability by using a global system that at once favors the offensive and allows for greater operational security. Not only does the 21st-century global system create operational benefits, but it has changed the strategic environment in ways amenable to transnational groups like al Qaeda. According to Audrey Cronin, the strategic picture is best visualized as a broad “enabling environment of bad governance, nonexistent social services, and unmet expectations that characterizes much of the developing world.”¹⁶ The rise of al Qaeda and the process of globalization are fundamentally intertwined. Indeed, Bruce Hoffman concludes that Osama bin Laden is the “quintessential product of the 1990s and globalism, [a] terrorism CEO [that] could not have existed—and thrived—in any other era.”¹⁷

The notion that al Qaeda operates in a uniquely enabling global environment is reinforced both by its deeds and, most especially, by its means. Rohan Gunaratna is right to criticize European counterterrorism approaches that target operational cells and “overlook support cells that disseminate propaganda, recruit members, procure supplies, maintain transport, forge false and adapted identities, facilitate travel, and organize safe houses.”¹⁸ In some ways, al Qaeda’s transnational network survives by grafting itself onto existing networks that are older and have enjoyed a long history of success. By using gang, drug, prison, money laundering, and smuggling networks to facilitate everything from recruitment to financing, material procurement, and operational support, al Qaeda is able to sustain a horizontal network structure

in the absence of a convenient state sanctuary. Whether one uses terms like convergence, netwar, or fourth-generation warfare to describe the systemic characteristics of transnational terror or insurgent groups, the underlying propositions are quite similar—namely that networked organizations are used both to create capabilities and to exploit an enemy’s vulnerabilities.¹⁹ In both the virtual and real worlds, networked support mechanisms are crucial to the success of transnational movements.

Support Mechanisms in a Uniquely Enabling Global Environment

Given that even horizontal transnational networks rely on a wide variety of service and support mechanisms, it is important to identify how these features add to or reinforce capability. Too often when dealing with transnational terror or insurgent groups, analysts will attempt to explore certain features (including ideology, strategy, and tactics) without framing their efforts around a holistic picture of what the organization looks like, and how specific capabilities fit into the larger whole. Moreover, given that al Qaeda is both an organization and a movement that is constantly adapting and evolving, it is imperative to understand how specific support capabilities help it survive. The following section explores how particular support mechanisms address al Qaeda’s autonomy, representation, and influence.

It is worth remembering that until quite recently, many analysts believed that large and active international terrorist organizations could not survive without significant state support.²⁰ While al Qaeda proved its spectacular capability on 11 September 2001, it displayed its truly revolutionary nature by virtue of its survival following the loss of Afghanistan as a secure state sanctuary. In fact, al Qaeda and its affiliates have carried out nearly double the number of attacks since 9/11 that they executed prior to that date.²¹ In this sense, al Qaeda’s continued existence after almost five years of offensive operations by the United States and its allies is evidence that it continues to be an autonomous transnational organization. This type of autonomy was created largely out of necessity, and it explains why we have seen al Qaeda evolve from a vertically structured organization to a horizontal, flatter structure. Where we once could link bin Laden and his immediate lieutenants to the various operational commanders throughout the world, these types of linkages are increasingly rare.²² Indeed, Marc Sageman was one of the first to argue that the post-9/11 picture of al Qaeda is “mostly that of a self-generated network with unusual characteristics of robustness and flexibility rather than one created by the intention of bin Laden.”²³ Beyond the strategic imperatives and the ideological evolution initiated by this flattening of al Qaeda, certain

support mechanisms still exist in a modified, decentralized form, and have become more important to the movement in the post-9/11 environment.

Most support mechanisms that existed prior to 11 September 2001 continue to contribute to al Qaeda's ability to retain its autonomy, yet some are clearly more important than others. The ability to draw resources from various financial sources, such as regional drug and criminal networks, for example, bequeaths to this transnational movement a logistical capability that helps to perpetuate its continued survival in a hostile environment.²⁴ However, there seems to be a general consensus in the policy community that targeting jihadist financial networks has not been an effective way of targeting terrorists—there is simply too much porosity in modern financial infrastructures that depend on the rapid movement of capital and the preservation of wealth and liquidity in virtual form.²⁵ Mobility mechanisms will be dealt with in more detail below, but the extent to which al Qaeda's service and support functions contribute to its autonomy as a transnational entity should be integrated into analysis of counterterrorism policy and practice.

Transnational terror networks can also be evaluated by the extent to which they are regenerative. In this sense, the ability of a network to regenerate and recuperate from losses is directly related to its ability to represent a compelling message to disparate groups in dozens of states and over thousands of miles. Contrary to the repeated messages that "al Qaeda is greatly diminished," or that a high percentage of its leadership has been killed or captured, al Qaeda as both an organization and a movement is defined by its "robust capacity for regeneration and a very diverse membership that cuts across ethnic, class, and national boundaries."²⁶ Moreover, according to Rohan Gunaratna, despite the high number of arrests incurred in the first six months following the 9/11 attacks, "al Qaeda has regenerated new cells as well as sustained many of its older ones. Nor has the severe disruption of al Qaeda's command and control operations in Afghanistan permanently crippled it."²⁷ While much of this capability is related to the appeal of the Salafist jihadist narrative and the socio-economic vulnerabilities inherent in Muslim audiences throughout the Middle East, Asia, and Europe, several support mechanisms facilitate the spread of this ideological narrative and should be targeted appropriately.²⁸ Areas for exploration in this context could include targeting popular internet sites that disseminate the Salafist message and display violent jihadist propaganda, revising hate speech laws in Western countries to prevent preachers from advocating violence, and passing strict immigration laws that prevent known jihadist figures from traveling freely in Europe.²⁹ The British government is moving forward on immigration reform, while its intelligence services are reportedly actively hacking popular jihadist websites.³⁰ While attempts at countering the jihadist message should remain a central component of counterterrorism strategy and

public diplomacy, that approach should be supported by efforts aimed at preventing the message from being easily disseminated in the first place.

The extent to which al Qaeda's overall influence in world affairs is directly related to its service and support mechanisms is clear—it cannot exist as a powerful transnational actor without an effective and robust infrastructure. Given that al Qaeda has been a singular priority for the United States and its allies for more than four years, however, there is more to al Qaeda's successful infrastructure than robust survivability—something else is at work. Helmuth von Moltke's famous quote, "no plan survives first contact with the enemy," also applies to the actors involved—contact with the enemy changes the player as well as the plan.³¹ Al Qaeda's ability not simply to survive in a hostile environment but to maintain an offensive posture and prosecute operations is directly related to its success in organizational learning. Through the mechanics of globalization outlined above, al Qaeda is able to acquire, interpret, distribute, and store information and knowledge.³² When one looks at the recent attacks in Madrid and London, for example, it becomes clear that whether or not these cells were formally "connected" to high-level jihadist operatives, these types of operations are analyzed and debated on jihadist websites and online forums. Some sites even contain instruction manuals and video clips on how to assemble bomb vests to maximize casualties.³³ Moreover, the operational tradecraft and the technology used for both London attacks were quite similar. Similarities between recent attacks are still being considered by various intelligence agencies, and the possible existence of so-called "connectors"—technical or operational experts acting as liaisons between disparate cells—continues to be debated.³⁴ Whatever the dominant learning method, the ability to detect a group's efforts to learn, anticipate its success or failure in learning, and thwart such attempts will factor heavily into the success of counterterrorism policy and practice over time.

Assessing Progress in Countering Terrorist Support Networks

Given the general exploration of the history and importance of support and mobility networks outlined above, it is worth examining in detail several mobility and support networks that are among the most dangerous known networks currently in operation. First, evidence has surfaced that several Taliban leaders have traveled to Iraq in order to observe insurgent operations and disseminate the knowledge they gain to their organizations in Afghanistan.³⁵ Such mobility networks are clearly a threat to coalition forces in Afghanistan and to the Karzai government. Second, the infiltration of thou-

sands of jihadists from North Africa, Europe, and the broader Middle East to battlefields in Iraq is extremely threatening both to American and Iraqi military forces, as well as to the nascent Iraqi government.³⁶ Finally, the conflict in Iraq, the recent attacks in Madrid and London, and the unrest in France have concentrated the focus of analysts on the existence of recruitment and mobility networks in Europe. These networks have been linked to numerous terrorist operations and are evidence of the importance of support and mobility to the broader jihadist movement.

It used to be that the primary concern regarding al Qaeda in a post-Taliban Afghanistan was the extent to which it would be able to maintain a low-level operational tempo by using its ability to remain hidden in the mountains in the Northwest Frontier Province in Pakistan.³⁷ Recently, however, as briefly alluded to above, al Qaeda and its affiliates have reportedly been involved in organizing trips to Iraq for Taliban insurgent leaders. Hamza Sangari, a Taliban commander from Khost Province, was quoted by *Newsweek* reporter Sami Yousafzai as saying, “God heard me and granted my request to see and learn from the Iraqi mujahedin.”³⁸ In what are essentially educational exchanges, these trips are apparently designed to teach Taliban leaders more advanced explosive and urban warfare tactics being used by jihadists in Iraq. Learning how to make rudimentary shaped-explosive charges operated by remote control, these Taliban leaders are helping their organizations learn by becoming force multipliers. “I’m explaining to my fighters every day the lessons I learned and my experience in Iraq,” Taliban insurgent leader Mohammed Daud told *Newsweek*. “I want to copy in Afghanistan the tactics and spirit of the glorious Iraqi resistance.”³⁹

Such exchanges appear to be having the desired effects. Not only has the frequency of violence in Afghanistan increased—with more Americans killed in 2005 than in 2004—but the emergence of suicide bombing as a prominent tactic is a “grave concern” among US officials.⁴⁰ Such concern is justified, according to Lieutenant General Michael Maples, head of the Defense Intelligence Agency. Testifying before the Senate Armed Service Committee in February 2006 along with Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte, Maples said that attacks in Afghanistan were up 20 percent between 2004 and 2005, that suicide attacks had increased “almost fourfold,” and that the use of improvised explosive devices had “more than doubled.”⁴¹

While it is unclear exactly how Taliban leaders are moving into and out of Iraq, one likely route may be the drug-smuggling networks originating from Baluchistan, a region of Pakistan bordering southern Afghanistan.⁴² Given that 52 percent of Afghanistan’s gross domestic product is derived from the growth and traffic of opium, it should come as no surprise that smuggling networks might be used by al Qaeda and the Taliban.⁴³ A recent upsurge

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in violence in southern Afghanistan will likely further complicate the ability of coalition and Afghan forces to prevent the use of these logistical routes.⁴⁴ Given the dramatic *increase* in the regional drug trade after the fall of the Taliban, the ability of Taliban and al Qaeda personnel to remain hidden while traversing increasingly popular smuggling routes will likely lead to a greater increase in the number of these jihadist “educational exchanges.” The ability of our enemies to move personnel from one operational theater to another reveals a level of integration and communication that defies the accepted wisdom of a fragmented and entirely decentralized jihadist network.

Recent American military operations in al-Anbar Province and the city of Tal Afar in Iraq have generated multiple press reports on an issue that military and civilian analysts have been concerned about for some time—that of foreign fighters using the Syrian border region to infiltrate into Iraq to battle coalition forces.⁴⁵ An excellent example of how a transnational terror movement like al Qaeda can generate a transnational component of what would otherwise be a nationalist insurgency, the network of trails surrounding the Euphrates River corridor has become the Iraq war’s equivalent of the Ho Chi Minh Trail that plagued American efforts during the Vietnam War.⁴⁶ The pressure on the Assad regime remains high, with President Bush making a series of public statements in late 2005 demanding that Damascus do more to prevent the infiltration.⁴⁷ While the number of foreign fighters in Iraq represents less than ten percent of the overall insurgency, they are reportedly responsible for a much larger percentage of the violence.⁴⁸

Like the Taliban leaders infiltrating from the east, the insurgents are using old smuggling networks to infiltrate into and out of Iraq. Moreover, the insurgents have access to a network of sympathetic Sunni mosques “in almost every village and town from Damascus to Baghdad.”⁴⁹ American efforts to prevent cross-border infiltration resulted in a series of clashes with Syrian troops last summer, and reports of American forces crossing the border in order to disrupt and destroy staging areas and training camps are reminiscent of operations against Cambodia during attempts to damage the Ho Chi Minh Trail.⁵⁰ While there are indications that continued pressure on Syria may be

causing the Assad government to decrease the ease with which foreign insurgents use Syria as a way-station on their road to jihad, reports of training camps, weapon depots, and the aid of Syrian intelligence officials continue to provide more than an ample dose of doubt concerning Syrian cooperation.⁵¹ The ability of al Qaeda to use Iraq's porous borders to infiltrate jihadists into the battlefields of western Iraq and the Sunni triangle will continue to complicate the security environment and the chances for a stable transition to a fully independent Iraq.

European policymakers and intelligence officials are growing increasingly worried about the connections between the continent and the Iraq war. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of "al Qaeda in Mesopotamia," is linked to several attacks outside Iraq, including the deadly November hotel bombings in Jordan.⁵² Moreover, the US National Counterterrorism Center believes that Zarqawi's network extends to over 40 countries and 24 militant groups worldwide.⁵³ This is not just speculation. Dozens of people alleged to have ties to Zarqawi have been arrested across Europe, and intelligence officials are increasingly concerned over the number of Europeans estimated to be fighting in Iraq. While reports are varied, British officials estimate that over 70 militants have traveled to Iraq from the United Kingdom, while French officials talk about "dozens."⁵⁴ According to *The New York Times*, senior intelligence officials from four European countries believe that "hundreds of young militant Muslim men have left Europe to fight in Iraq."⁵⁵

While the numbers involved are still unclear, what is starting to generate serious concern are the consequences of jihadist militants acquiring a high level of combat experience and expertise in urban warfare and then returning to their countries of origin. An assessment by the Central Intelligence Agency is said to warn that "Iraq may prove to be an even more effective training ground for Islamic extremists than Afghanistan was in al Qaeda's early days, because it is serving as a real-world laboratory for urban combat."⁵⁶ CIA Director Porter Goss testified before the Senate in February 2005, concluding, "Those [jihadists] who survive will leave Iraq experienced in, and focused on, acts of urban terrorism. They represent a pool of contacts to build transnational terrorist cells, groups, and networks."⁵⁷ Were substantial numbers of European jihadists to return to the continent with advanced skills in tradecraft and weaponry acquired in Iraq, law enforcement and intelligence agencies in Europe would surely be at a disadvantage.

In addition to the skill-set that European militants would acquire as participants in the Iraqi insurgency, the possibilities of a new generation of jihadist networks taking form should be taken seriously. The origins of al Qaeda, after all, are intricately linked to bin Laden's use of a database of mujahideen contact information during the later years of the anti-Soviet jihad

in Afghanistan.⁵⁸ The longer Iraq continues to function as a magnet for the global jihadist movement, the more dangerous these new networks will become. Given the multiple arrests of European militants allegedly affiliated with his network, it would be dangerous and foolhardy to assume that Zarqawi does not place strategic value on his European members.⁵⁹ The Taliban leaders who are smuggled into Iraq to learn advanced urban warfare tactics, for example, reportedly do not participate in direct combat because they are too valuable as force multipliers. For al Qaeda in general and Zarqawi's network in particular, the road to jihad in Europe certainly runs through the Sunni triangle in Iraq.

Preparing for the Perfect Storm

Al Qaeda is alive, well, and preparing for the future. Al Qaeda as an organization is learning how to survive as a constantly hunted transnational entity. Al Qaeda as a movement is greatly benefiting from the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, and especially in Iraq. The jihadist narrative carries a resonance and a logic that thousands of Muslims find completely compelling. While it is surely more difficult for al Qaeda to operate now than before the 9/11 attacks, reports of its imminent demise have been proven wrong time and again. As thousands of foreign fighters continue to wage their jihad in Iraq, and as Taliban and al Qaeda leaders continue to network and travel via virtual superhighways and ancient smuggling routes, Western intelligence and law enforcement agencies are growing increasingly concerned. While thousands of officers, agents, and analysts are working hard to protect their nations from terrorism, more attention needs to be paid to how support and mobility networks enable terrorist groups not only to survive, but to thrive as transnational entities. What follows are four general recommendations on targeting jihadist mobility and support networks during the "long war."

First, counterterrorism needs to refocus on offensive strategies. While "going on the offensive" has become a rhetorical cliché by virtue of its use by seemingly every head of state who wants to appear tough on terrorism, offensive strategies are not as common as they should be. For example, while monitoring jihadist websites and financial transactions can be useful in gaining intelligence on the enemy, a purely defensive posture is unwise. The reported effort by British intelligence services to attack the jihadist presence on the internet is a positive, offensive strategy that greatly complicates the ability of terrorists to communicate over the internet, as well as decreasing the ease by which sympathizers and potential militants can access jihadist propaganda, training videos, and ideological writings. The American intelligence community should implement a mix of offensive hacking of jihadist websites and defensive monitoring when there is good reason to believe that the benefits of passive observation outweigh the costs of keeping the sites accessible to millions.

Second, while human intelligence is the sine qua non of victory against al Qaeda and its affiliates, Western intelligence services should make better use of their comparative advantages. Since transnational terror groups are more reliant on the types of benefits a globalized world can offer, they are more vulnerable to efforts at targeting support mechanisms. For example, while it is extremely difficult to directly infiltrate a jihadist terror network, it may be easier to access the types of transnational networks they depend on for survival. Drug networks, international gangs, organized crime, money laundering, human smuggling chains, and international arms dealers may all have contact with jihadist groups, yet it is unclear whether infiltration of such networks is a bona fide counterterrorism priority, or if these interdisciplinary approaches suffer from bureaucratic obstacles and problems with interagency coordination. One can be sure that such networks are already targeted by various agencies, but if such efforts are seen as critical to undermining al Qaeda and other like-minded transnational groups, more success in countering the types of support and mobility structures outlined above may result.

Third, international cooperation is absolutely vital in the war on terrorism. Some progress has been seen in this regard, and more resources should be devoted to international intelligence and law enforcement cooperation. For example, recent reports of “Alliance Base”—the multinational intelligence center in Paris created by the Central Intelligence Agency and the French General Directorate for External Security—portray an excellent example of multilateral intelligence cooperation.⁶⁰ Western nations are surely safer from transnational terrorism if their leaders prioritize international intelligence cooperation. Indeed, joint intelligence work is reported to have been responsible for identifying, tracking, and eliminating the “vast majority of committed jihadists who have been targeted outside Iraq and Afghanistan since the September 11th attacks.”⁶¹ However, some European intelligence officials believe efforts at cooperation have not been proceeding fast enough. One officer told the *Financial Times* that “the threat is multiplying but in an awful lot of the intelligence and security services the underlying mentality hasn’t shifted from a ‘need to know’ to ‘need to share.’”⁶² Transnational jihadist networks are best countered by deep working alliances between constellations of committed allies. While European attention is currently concentrated on the so-called “secret prisons,” it would be a disaster if transatlantic intelligence cooperation was to become a casualty of this controversy. Irrespective of the whims of politics, prudence requires that the success of efforts like Alliance Base be replicated to the greatest extent feasible.⁶³

Fourth, all agencies involved in prosecuting the long war need to allocate more resources to efforts at understanding how the processes of learning and innovation are affecting strategic perception and operational effectiveness.

For al Qaeda in general, and our enemies in Iraq in particular, their success in learning from and adapting to the types of strategies US and Coalition forces employ is clear. The persistent threat of improvised explosive devices, for example, is but one indication that our enemies are able to understand changing patterns, identify weaknesses, and exploit vulnerabilities.⁶⁴ More work needs to be done in the government, think-tanks, and universities to explore how our adversaries learn and adapt in a decentralized and fluid environment.⁶⁵

The Department of Defense does a far better job than most agencies of prioritizing and allocating resources to understand learning and encourage innovation. From the organizational solutions like the Army's Combat Training Centers, the Center for Lessons Learned, and the Asymmetric Warfare Group, to the Quadrennial Defense Review process, DOD's efforts at institutionalizing imagination and innovation need to be strengthened internally and mirrored externally.⁶⁶ As General Peter Schoomaker concluded in his forward to Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl's influential book, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*: "For the twenty-first century, we must have an Army characterized by a culture of innovation and imagination."⁶⁷ Finally, policymakers and civilian leaders need to make sustained efforts at institutionalizing interagency learning and strategic planning. Some thought has been given to creating a QDR analogue for the entire US national security apparatus—such thinking should be taken seriously by those tasked with prosecuting and winning the long war.⁶⁸ In a conflict characterized by transnational complexity and networked, intelligent enemies, creating cultures of learning, innovation, and imagination constitutes a sine qua non for victory.

A Framework for the Long War

At the dawn of the last "long war," an American diplomat serving in Moscow perceived the essence of the developing Cold War with the Soviet Union, and felt compelled to warn Washington by sending what became the famous "long telegram." It was published by *Foreign Affairs* in 1947 under the pseudonym "X." The author, George Kennan, wrote that the Soviet Union's "political action is a fluid stream which moves constantly, wherever it is permitted to move, toward a given goal. Its main concern is to make sure that it has filled every nook and cranny available to it in the basin of world power. But if it finds unassailable barriers in its path, it accepts these philosophically and accommodates itself to them. The main thing is that there should always be pressure, unceasing constant pressure, toward the desired goal."⁶⁹ Kennan's insight into the nature of the Soviet Union helps to illuminate both the challenge and a countering strategy for those prosecuting the first long war of the 21st century.

While there are dangers associated with comparing historical foes to current adversaries, al Qaeda is clearly interested in "filling every nook and

cranny available to it.” Furthermore, the way our enemies in the long war are able to detect, adapt, and circumvent “unassailable barriers” defines the challenges faced when confronting the service and support networks used by al Qaeda and its affiliates. In its recent “report card” issued last December, the 9/11 Commission gave the US government failing grades in several areas related to its prosecution of the long war and its attempts at securing the homeland. Commission member Timothy Roemer stated his concern that “al Qaeda is quickly changing and we are not. Al Qaeda is highly dynamic and we are not. Al Qaeda is highly imaginative and we are not.”⁷⁰

As the five-year anniversary of the 11 September attacks approaches, we face an enemy that is both a transnational organization and a growing ideological movement. As long as the war in Iraq continues, more recruits will join the disparate terror networks that feed off the conflict. When the war eventually ends, al Qaeda will have acquired a new generation of jihadists—hundreds or thousands with urban warfare skills gained from the fight against American troops in the Sunni triangle and the Euphrates corridor. Offensive strategies are needed that target what this transnational network depends on most, a uniquely enabling global environment. Western intelligence agencies need to cooperate seamlessly while targeting those support and mobility networks that allow al Qaeda to perpetually evolve and adapt in a hostile environment. At the same time, analysts and academics need to develop a research agenda that aims at understanding how transnational groups learn and adapt in a constantly changing environment. By understanding and shaping the virtual and transnational battlefield, the United States and its allies will stand a better chance of success at discovering, targeting, and destroying the tentacles of the global jihad.

NOTES

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1. US Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington: DOD, 6 February 2006), p. v.

2. Emma Davis, “Belgium Arrests 14 Over Links to Suicide Bomber,” *Reuters*, 30 November 2005. Sebastian Rotella, “Female Bomber in Iraq Marks Grim First,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 December 2005, sec. A, p. 3.

3. See Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (New York: Berkley Books, 2003), p. 128.

4. See Mark Basile, “Going to the Source: Why Al Qaeda’s Financial Network is Likely to Withstand the Current War on Terrorist Financing,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 27 (May/June 2004), 169-85.

5. See Ersel Aydinli, “From Finances to Transnational Mobility: Searching for the Global Jihadists’ Achilles’ Heel,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 18 (Summer 2006). I thank Dr. Aydinli for his insight and permission to expand on his notion of “transnational mobility” as a key feature of counterterrorism strategy.

6. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), p. 338.

7. Harry Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1995), p. 201.

8. Clausewitz, p. 339.

9. Summers, p. 114. William Rosenau, *Special Operations Forces and Elusive Enemy Ground Targets: Lessons from Vietnam and the Persian Gulf War* (Arlington, Va.: RAND, 2001). John Prados, *The Blood Road: The Ho Chi Minh Trail and the Vietnam War* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1999).
10. See Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars* (New York: Penguin, 2004). Mohammed Yousef, *Afghanistan, The Bear Trap: The Defeat of a Superpower* (London: Casemate, 2001).
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