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Fear and Outrage as Terrorists' Goals

JOHN A. LYNN II

on the morning of 9/11, Americans across the country witnessed al Qaeda's terrorist attacks as appalling images that provoked shock at the slaughter, grief for the victims, and furor toward the perpetrators. Islamist radicals had succeeded in striking an intensely visceral blow. Even though the destruction was great, it once again became brutally clear that the power of terrorist violence derives not primarily from the physical damages it inflicts, but from the states of mind it provokes. This realization dominates our definitions of terrorism, which usually stress its intention to achieve victory by engendering fear. American reactions to 9/11, however, illustrate that we need to recognize the centrality of another emotion—outrage. While accepting the importance of fear in terrorist schemes, this article insists that to understand the dynamics of terrorism we should also grant that many of its most important gains come not by instilling fear but by inciting outrage.

The reinterpretation offered in these pages grew out of teaching the history of terrorism in university classrooms for almost a decade. It begins by reexamining some of the basics—the definition, diversity, and dynamics of terrorism—to arrive at a better understanding of the ways in which actions of relatively few terrorists can generate such intense moral outrage. As an example of the tactical manipulation of such outrage, the focus shifts briefly to the efforts of the Provisional IRA to provoke a violent overreaction by British troops on Bloody Sunday in 1972 and to benefit from the fatal shots the soldiers fired that day. The article then presents testimony supporting the hypotheses that 9/11 was meant to be similarly provocative and that al Qaeda succeeded by drawing the United States into an ill-considered war in Iraq. The article finally hazards the opinion that war ensued not simply because of the mind-set of the Bush administration but also because of the unsatisfied wrath of the American people. Yet as in the case with so many journeys, the greater value of this intellectual expedition comes not from reaching its end point but in what it discovers along the way.

After retiring from the University of Illinois, John Lynn moved to Northwestern University as Distinguished Professor of Military History. In 1994-95, he served as Oppenheimer Professor of Warfighting Strategy at Marine Corps University. While he has published extensively on early modern European war and military institutions. He is currently writing a book on the history of terrorism for Yale University Press.

Defining Terrorism in Terms of Fear

Common definitions of terrorism almost always stress fear. The noted authority Bruce Hoffman, in his *Inside Terrorism*, exemplifies this: "We may . . . define terrorism as the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change It is meant to instill fear within, and thereby intimidate, a wider 'target audience." James M. Poland echoes the same emphasis in his much-read, *Understanding Terrorism*: "Terrorism is the premeditated, deliberate, systematic murder, mayhem, and threatening of the innocent to create fear and intimidation in order to gain a political or tactical advantage, usually to influence an audience." Official definitions repeat this formula; the current *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, as amended to 15 February 2012, defines terrorism as: "The unlawful use of violence or threat of violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies. Terrorism is often motivated by religious, political, or other ideological beliefs and committed in the pursuit of goals that are usually political."

Without denying the coercive force of fear, it is still critical to realize that, within the context of those forms of terrorism that most concern the United States today, outrage can be a more important consequence of terrorist acts. The parameters of this article do not allow a full examination of the complex relationship between fear and outrage; certainly the same action can lead to either reaction, and fear can be an element in stimulating outrage. It may be best to consider them as opposite poles along a continuum of response. Simply put, fear has more to do with paralysis than with assertion, and the measures it promotes are mainly protective and defensive; the terrorist engenders fear in the hopes of compelling compliance. Importantly, all three of the authoritative definitions of terrorism just presented link fear with intimidation. In contrast, outrage inspires retaliation, and importantly, that retaliation is seen as righteous, as will be argued below. While fear is uncomfortable, outrage is in some ways its own reward, because the actions it incites can serve as emotional and moral release.

For those who are quick to believe that the terrorists' primary goal is to paralyze their victims with fear, reprisals born of outrage can be dangerously seductive. On a superficial level, it might seem that Americans could defeat the terrorist enemy simply by not showing fear, and what better way to demonstrate resolute resistance than by defiant words and aggressive blows? Among American reactions to 9/11, popular culture took on an assertive bravado. It showed up from lapel pins to banners, and in our music. Not surprisingly, the traditionally patriotic medium of country music was particularly overt. Toby Keith threatened in *Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue*: "Hey, Uncle Sam put your name at the top of his list, And the Statue of Liberty started shaking her fist. And the eagle will fly and it's gonna be hell, When you hear Mother Freedom start ringing her bell. And it'll feel like the whole wide world is raining down on you." In *Have You Forgotten*, Darryl Worley declared, "Some say this country's just out looking for a fight, Well, after 9/11 man I'd have to say that's right." The chorus demanding sharp-edged responses could also be heard

far outside Nashville. Neil Young, that icon of the counterculture that rejected American involvement in Vietnam, offered up *Let's Roll*, "You've got to turn on evil, When it's coming after you, You've gotta face it down, And when it tries to hide, You've gotta go in after it, And never be denied."

The revenge advocated was not to be a dish served cold, but one fired by the heat of outrage. After 9/11, American desire for vengeance was certainly understandable and entirely consistent with theories of social psychology that stress the appeal of us-versus-them rhetoric and action at such times of extreme challenge.⁴ Nonetheless, rash retaliation can be self-defeating, and astute terrorists not only know this, they count on it.

The Diversity and Unity of Terrorism

Understanding the relative roles of fear and outrage requires taking into consideration three fundamentals of terrorism: the great variety of its forms; the contrasting dynamics of strength and weakness within this diversity; and the defining moral transgression that gives unity to terrorism's many avatars.

Like "cancer," "terrorism" is an umbrella term for a number of related but still quite distinct maladies. In university-based classes on the history of terrorism, this author distinguishes between at least sixteen general categories of terrorism.⁵ These include such diverse forms as:

- Tactics employed by powerful regimes to intimidate their own populations.
- Abuses committed by majority ethnic populations against vulnerable minorities to subjugate them or drive them away.
- Strategies of small bands of violent radicals who attack established governments in the name of separatist or Marxist goals.
- Attacks perpetrated by clusters of millenarian Islamists hoping to humiliate the United States and usher in a new caliphate.

In stressing the considerable diversity of terrorism, the approach runs counter to those authorities who caution that overly inclusive definitions of terrorism become useless.⁶ While restricting the phenomenon included under the umbrella of terrorism may be necessary for legal and diplomatic purposes, a broader approach promises a more fundamental understanding of terrorism.

Some forms of terrorism are the actions of the strong against the weak, while others reverse this relationship, changing the goals and impact of terrorist acts. Most textbooks inform their readers that the word "terror" made its first political appearance as the "Reign of Terror" during the height of the French Revolution, when terror was meant to compel conformity to a particular vision of revolutionary virtue. Maximillian Robespierre explained: "If the mainspring of popular government in peacetime is virtue, the mainspring of popular government in revolution is virtue and terror both: virtue, without which terror is disastrous; terror, without which virtue is powerless." Stalin employed this kind of terror on a far larger scale to silence opposition during his purges. When the state terrorizes its own people, the dynamic is that of the strong against the weak, and the goal of this terror is, indeed, to foster compliance through fear.

Al Qaeda's actions against the United States, however, represent a very different kind of terrorism, that of the weak against the strong. Few in number and limited in resources, al Qaeda and its affiliates have struck the most powerful country on earth. When counterterrorist intelligence discovers the membership and assets of terrorist groups, it is generally shocking how few individuals are actually engaged in violence. Estimates concerning the Red Brigades in Italy and the Red Army Faction in Germany during the 1970s, for example, reveal only handfuls of shooters and bombers. Even isolated terrorists can do great damage. As we will discuss, terrorist attacks by the weak are often intended to strengthen their movement as much or more than they are meant to harm the enemy.

One challenge, and reward, in accepting the full variety of terrorism is the consequent search for and identification of a defining unity within that diversity. This unity cannot be found in its causes or goals, but it exists in the morality of its methods, which, from the victim's point of view, stand outside the ethical universe of "proper" war. War is supposed to be a contest between two or more armed parties, all able to deal out death and destruction to the other. In such a conflict, acts of violence are legitimate as acts of self-defense. At its most basic, it is kill or be killed. But terrorism targets those unable or unprepared to defend themselves. Some authorities on terrorism express this truth stating that terrorists attack civilians, not troops. But that is too restrictive, since the Marines in their Beruit barracks or the airmen in Khobar Towers also deserve to be counted as victims of terrorism.

Rather than gaining praise as acts of valor in deadly combat, attacks on the defenseless are condemned as evil murder. Here is the unity of terrorism, and this unity inspires the moral outrage that concerns us in the article. The constant use of the word "evil" by the Bush administration to describe 9/11 exemplifies this indignation; between September 2001 and March 2002, the president explicitly referred to evil 199 times in foreign policy speeches. he minced no words: "Osama bin Laden is an evil man. His heart has been so corrupted that he's willing to take innocent life. And we are fighting evil, and we will continue to fight evil, and we will not stop until we defeat evil." 10

Making Weak Terrorists Stronger through the Help of their Victims

The terrorists who have so troubled the world since the 1960s, as different as the nationalist IRA and the Islamist al Qaeda, have perpetrated a terrorism of the weak against the strong, in which they have sought to employ the wrath of their victims to mobilize more supporters to the cause of the terrorists. They have been able to do so by what Daniel Fromkin calls "a sort of jujitsu," the "ingenuity" of which consists of "using an opponent's own strength against him." As Fromkin pointed out, the path toward multiplying the number, resources, and power of terrorism lies in provoking the adversary's outrage so that he will use his strength to do something that is essentially self-defeating. If effective, the terrorists turn their adversaries into agents of the terrorists' will.

This jujitsu results from another fundamental of terrorism: it is political theater that plays to several audiences. One problem with many definitions of

terrorism, such as the three presented previously, is that they are written by and for the audience of victims. Terrorists also play to those whose support they already enjoy or hope to win over.¹² Should terrorists recruit the uncommitted, they can raise the conflict to a higher, more intense level. Terrorism can be considered an entry level of war, requiring even fewer resources and combatants than a guerrilla campaign. To the degree that terrorists hope to escalate the fighting, they need to increase their assets. In the case of national-based terrorists, this could allow them to advance to a full insurgency and, ultimately, a triumphal conventional stage, as described by Mao Zedong. Ariel Merari, the head of the Center for Political Violence at Tel Aviv University, puts it succinctly: "One might say that all terrorist groups want to be guerrillas when they grow up." ¹³ In the case of a terrorist with a global horizon, more resources promise a broader reach.

The IRA, or more accurately the Provisional IRA, or Provos, applied this deadly terrorist jujitsu in Northern Ireland. Consider the most iconic event of "The Troubles": Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972, when British troops fired on unarmed civil rights demonstrators in Derry, killing thirteen and wounding an equal number. This deadly event had been preceded by a long campaign of attacks by the Provos against the British Army in Derry. Between August and mid-December 1971, the Provos fired nearly 2,000 rounds at British troops, killing seven soldiers. A former Provo, Sean O'Hara, explained the callous strategy of provocation:

Things have always been manipulated, always. In 1971, . . . for six weeks or possibly two months every single night we were out agitating, we were out throwing petrol bombs, nail bombs, we were stirring, we were really putting the Army under pressure . . . But we knew the situation was going to happen, right? If we provoked them enough, if we attacked them enough, at some point it wasn't just us they were going to be shooting at, it was the people There was a difference between somebody getting shot in a gun battle and some innocent people getting shot in the streets. And we knew the situation had to come [in order] to escalate the war. That they had to shoot civilians and we knew that. And we agitated and agitated until we got to that situation.

We had to move the violence to a new level, right? And the only way that we could do that was causing thems [sic] to commit the outrageous, to shoot innocent civilians. But this was inevitable because if you are going out and there's riots going on and some people are throwing stones and they're throwing bombs, at the end of the day they are going to retaliate. As soon as they shoot somebody, you cry, 'Foul, they are shooting innocent people.' Which, in a sense they were, but the situation was engineered.¹⁵

The Provos were weak in numbers, and in order to "move the violence to a new level," O'Hara explains, "[they] needed the whole situation to be escalated. The thing was always planned." And the Provos succeeded. One of their leaders testified: "Bloody Sunday was a turning point. Whatever lingering chance had existed for change through constitutional means vanished.

Recruitment to the IRA rocketed as a result. Events that day probably led more young nationalists to join the Provisionals than any other single action by the British." One incensed partisan explained: "It was only on Bloody Sunday that I thought . . . we got to meet violence with violence here, even if I am going to be killed on the streets. Bloody Sunday is a . . . defining moment for the IRA because like after Bloody Sunday they had complete legitimacy, before Bloody Sunday they didn't have any at all." 17

Al Qaeda, Afghanistan, and Iraq

The interplay of terrorists with their multiple audiences is certainly relevant in analyzing the terrorism that most concerns Americans today—that of violent Islamist extremists directed against the United States—above all by the events of 9/11.

In 1996 and 1998, Osama bin Laden issued a call to target America because it was supporting Israel against the Palestinians, stationing troops within the sacred land of Saudi Arabia, and conducting a campaign designed to humiliate and kill Muslims. In bin Laden's narrative, the United States was engaged in a war against Islam.\(^{18}\) To the degree that the body of Muslim believers, the Ummah, accept this narrative, the Ummah may accept al Qaeda attacks as justified, or even as moral imperatives, because jihad is required in defence of Islam. In order to gain support for al Qaeda and its goals, bin Laden had to win over the audience of disaffected Muslims.

Did bin Laden design the 9/11 attacks to advance the narrative and gain supporters for Islamist extremists by provoking US reprisals? Was the invasion of Afghanistan and the later invasion of Iraq an American "Bloody Sunday"? The answer to this remains a matter of debate. In the most recent authoritative book tracing the war on terror, *The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict between America and al-Qaeda* (2011), author Peter Bergen dismisses any assertion that bin Laden was trying to use terrorist jujitsu on America.¹⁹ Bergen insists that bin Laden was convinced America was so weak-willed that the 9/11 attacks would serve as a kind of magnified "Black Hawk Down," inducing the Americans to retreat from meddling in Middle Eastern affairs, just as we withdrew from Somalia.

But in *The Longest War*, Bergen presents little if any hard evidence to make his case, and there is important testimony to the contrary. In a 1996 interview conducted by journalist Abdule Bari Atwan in Tora Bora, bin Laden announced, "We want to bring the Americans to fight us on Muslim land. If we can fight them on our own territory we will beat them, because the battle will be on our terms in a land they neither know nor understand." In discussing the October 2000 attack on the *U.S.S. Cole*, the *9/11 Commission Report* referred to evidence that bin Laden expected and desired US retaliation. The report concluded: "According to the source, bin Laden wanted the United States to attack, and if it did not, he would launch something bigger." Ahmed Zaidan, Pakistan correspondent for *Al Jazeera*, spoke to bin Laden's lieutenant, Mohammed Atef, in February 2001, when Atef described al Qaeda strategy:

He was explaining to me what's going to happen in the coming five years There are two or three places in the world which [are] the most suitable places to fight Americans: Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia. We are expecting the United States to invade Afghanistan. And we are preparing for that. We want them to come to Afghanistan."²²

In addition, the notion that particularly strong American reprisals were not a consideration seems to run counter to Bergen's own reports that in 2000 the United States warned the Taliban about dire consequences for Afghanistan should al Qaeda attack again, a warning that the Taliban took so seriously that their leader, Mullah Omar, even asked bin Laden to leave Afghanistan.²³ In the face of these facts, it is impossible to dismiss the strong possibility that bin Laden expected the United States would bog down in Afghanistan just as the Russians had, producing similar results. A man like bin Laden was bound to trust the history of the anti-Russian jihad, 1979-88, and the intervention of Allah.

Admittedly, the jury is still out; perhaps the documents found at bin Laden's refuge in Abbottabad may shed more light on the issue. Yet even if Bergen is correct in his insistence that bin Laden miscalculated the reprisals that 9/11 might provoke, that fact alone would not invalidate emphasizing the role of outrage in the events that followed. While astute terrorists factor in the provocative character of their acts, it is circumstance and not intentions that determine the degree to which wrath intervenes. And, as Clausewitz warns, the consequences of violent action in war defy exact prediction.

In hindsight, American commitment to the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan after 9/11 seems both inevitable and justified. But the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was neither inevitable, nor was it probably necessary, and it certainly was poorly conceived and planned, at least beyond the defeat of Saddam Hussein's conventional forces. It is not the point here to advance a theory as to why the Bush administration pushed for war, but it is very much to the point to ponder the degree to which American popular outrage facilitated the coming of the war. Frankly, it can be argued that many Americans accepted the administration's argument for the invasion of Iraq because they wanted to strike out against somebody. The United States had taken down the Taliban in Afghanistan but failed to bag bin Laden. The president resonated with much of the population when he offered the American people another way to vent the wrath expressed by post 9/11 popular culture, as in the songs quoted earlier in this article.

The president's claim that Saddam Hussein was linked to the 9/11 attack was what Americans wanted to hear; a 13 September 2001 *Time*/CNN poll revealed that a surprising 78 percent of those polled suspected Saddam to be in some way responsible for 9/11.²⁴ In March 2003, initial enthusiasm for the war was strong, 72 percent pro and only 22 percent con.²⁵ In fact, this correlates with continued belief that the Iraqi dictator bore responsibility for the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. A *Washington Post* poll published on 6 September 2003 reported that 69 percent of those polled still believed that it was "at least likely that Hussein was involved." Americans were determined to get back at bin Laden, and Saddam made a convenient proxy.

As it turned out, the invasion of Iraq and the armed occupation that followed worked to the advantage of al Qaeda through 2006. The International Institute for Strategic Studies reported in 2004 that the invasion of Iraq proved a great boon to al Qaeda recruitment and fundraising. American actions provided recruiting tools, among them the horrific treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, a scandal that began to break in early 2004. Troubles in Fallujah, from the shootings of civilian demonstrators in April 2003 through the first major American offensive there a year later alienated the Sunni community. Lieutenant General Sanchez, then commanding in Iraq, saw that offensive as a critical watershed: To say that the Fallujah offensive angered the Sunni Muslims of Iraq would be a gross understatement [The] Sunni triangle exploded with violence. In September 2004, the outspoken British diplomat, Ivor Roberts, accused President Bush of being the best recruiting sergeant ever for al-Qaida. The hard fighting in Fallujah again in November 2004 can be seen as adding support to this.

Muslim Opinion and Radicalization

And in a broader sense, American actions in Afghanistan and Iraq ultimately supported the al Qaeda narrative of a Western war against Islam. Scholars of Middle East terrorism, such as Mary Habeck in her *Know the Enemy*, emphasize the arguments of present-day jihadists, which can be traced back at least to the thirteenth-century writings of Taqi ad-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah. ³⁰ Habeck and others report that violent Islamists wish for a return to fundamentalist Islam, frown on democracy because it replaces divine Sharia law with the profane laws of men, and believe that the West is waging a war against Islam.

Thankfully, real world Muslim opinion differs from Islamic convictions in important ways, as demonstrated by John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed in their *Who Speaks for Islam*, which is based on extensive Gallup polling data from Ummah around the world. For example, popular attitudes are much more favorable toward democracy, human rights, and opportunities for women.³¹ The events of the Arab Spring lend weight to these findings. Nonetheless, the polling data is very sobering regarding Muslim perceptions of Western prejudice. When polled as to what they resented most about the West, the respondents put the following three factors at the top of the list:

- Sexual and cultural promiscuity.
- Ethical and moral corruption.
- Hatred of Muslims.32

Esposito and Mogahed also report a far less scientific example, the typical comments of a mini-van driver in Cairo: "America hates Islam; look at what they did to Iraq." The notion of an American-led Western war against Islam has purchase among the Ummah.

In his studies of modern Islamist terrorism, the highly regarded scholar Marc Sagemen also stressed the importance of a belief that the West is attacking Islam. He defines "radicalization" as the "process of transforming individuals from rather unexceptional and ordinary beings into terrorists with the willingness

to use violence for political ends." This process includes four prongs, the first two of which are a sense of moral outrage at apparent crimes against Muslims both globally and locally and the belief that this moral violation is part of a larger war against Islam. ³⁴ The third is beliefs resonate with personal experience, including what one learns from observation, word of mouth, and news. Therefore, when the United States provides evidence that the Ummah can interpret as demonstrating the existence of a war against Islam, we are aiding the process of radicalization.

The polling and research presented by Esposito, Mogahed, and Sageman leads one to question how central formal Islamist theology and theory is to Islamist terrorism. It would appear what matters most is the strong belief that Muslims have been grievously wronged, either globally or in particular countries. Sageman concludes that jahadist operatives in the West, "were not intellectuals or ideologues, much less religious scholars. It is not about how they think, but how they feel." 35

Studies of suicide bombing conducted by Robert Pape contribute even more to this conclusion. His work indicates that such extreme acts of terror arise in resistance to the occupation of Muslim lands rather than because of the flowering of religious extremism. Pape argues: "More than 95 percent of all suicide attacks are in response to foreign occupation, according to extensive research that we conducted at the University of Chicago's Project on Security and Terrorism, where we examined every one of the over 2,200 suicide attacks across the world from 1980 to the present day." He concludes, "occupations in the Muslim world don't make Americans any safer—in fact, they are at the heart of the problem." One must recognize that occupations of particular Muslim countries also feed the narrative of a global war against Islam.

The Need to Do Something and Its Cost

Even though there is good reason now to question the wisdom of our invasion of Iraq, it is far from certain that things would have been a great deal different if wiser counsel had received more attention. This article hypothesizes that outrage, which insists on aggressive retaliation, demanded that we had to do something, perhaps anything, in order to gain the seductive satisfaction that the United States had punished evil terrorists for their sins. Our attacks aimed at the Taliban and, especially, at Saddam Hussein's regime ultimately fed the Islamist narrative, strengthening those feelings of abuse that served to radicalize jihadists. Fear, the reaction by which most observers define terrorism, certainly accounted for many actions in the United States after 9/11, such as increased airport security and the passage of the Uniting (and) Strengthening America (by) Providing Appropriate Tools Required (to) Intercept (and) Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001 (USA PATRIOT Act). But it is outrage that played a more important role in shaping American actions abroad.

Once engaged, the violence born of outrage has a way of perpetuating itself through the logic of loss. In military history, the influence of casualties and cost operate differently as time passes. At first, losses justify further investment. Abraham Lincoln expressed this eloquently in his Gettysburg

Address: "It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain." With less eloquence, but equal sincerity, President George W. Bush addressed veterans in Salt Lake City in 2004 concerning the ongoing Iraq war, "We owe them something. We will finish the task that they gave their lives for." Only with time and the realization that additional losses only increase the toll rather than give it meaning, does attrition wear down the will to fight. Outrage and anger fade, fear and exhaustion take their places.

This article is not intended as a criticism of the past, but as an attempt to extract from it some guidance for the future. As argued here, terrorism encompasses several categories of violence and intimidation, not simply the radical Islamist attacks that so concern us now. The multiple avatars of terrorism include actions by the strong directed against the weak and by the weak against the strong, and this contrast in dynamics can generate misconceptions concerning the terrorists' goals of instilling fear and inciting outrage. Those who want to defeat terrorism, but are confused as to its dynamics and goals, run the risk of pouring gasoline rather than water on menacing fires. Such cautions matter so much because terrorism constitutes the form of warfare with the lowest and most easily crossed threshold; therefore, it is a malevolent genie that will not quickly go back into the bottle when it is so often summoned to serve such a great spectrum of causes. Within this spectrum, when terrorists who are weak in numbers and resources wish to expand their reach or escalate their struggle. they will engage in acts of terrorism calculated to provoke self-defeating retaliation by the strong. The astute terrorist recognizes that his victims' outrage furnishes him with the leverage needed to throw his enemies off balance. This warning needs to be taken to heart by the military, but it also needs to be heard by policymakers and populations so eager for retaliation that they are tempted to be ruled by gut impulse rather than thoughtful calculations. In countering terrorist jujitsu, agility and intelligence matter far more than muscle.

Notes

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- 3. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02 (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, November 8, 2010 (As Amended Through 15 February 2012), 332.
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