



NEWPORT PAPERS

A Series of Point Papers
from the Naval War College and the
Navy Warfare Development Command
For Senior Leadership
In Response to Critical Issues

Strategy / CONOPS / Doctrine / Decision

United States Naval War College
Navy Warfare Development Command
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**THE TERROR WAR:
ALTERNATIVE FUTURES**

Objective: To identify and evaluate the range of potential end states, or outcomes, that could emerge in the war on terror.

Background: In wartime, one key component of a grand strategy vision is determining what "end state" or alternative future the nation would like to exist once hostilities have finished. End state refers, in this case, to the strategic environment in which the United States will operate after the cessation of hostilities. The relationship between war objectives and end states is not always straightforward. In order to determine what potential end states might emerge in the wake of the war on terror, we must attempt to determine the impact of our actions on the international environment.

Developing an exit strategy depends, in part, on understanding what objectives and end state the nation is trying to achieve. With a desired end state established, an exit strategy can be developed that allows for the withdrawal of U.S. military forces once an objective or set of objectives have been achieved. Similar reasoning can be applied to the war on terror. To know how long the war on terror should last and when "victory" can be declared, policymakers must think about what end states are both desirable (or at least acceptable) and achievable.

Discussion: Determining what end state is preferred is a political decision that should be made on the basis of national objectives and a careful analysis of the costs and benefits of achieving potential end states. Military leaders should provide substantive inputs into this end state analysis when the armed forces will be one of the primary policy instruments employed and may bear a disproportionate share of the costs in terms of lives, resources, and, perhaps, blame if things go wrong.

At this time it is impossible to determine what end state will emerge, either by design or by chance, from the war on terror. This point paper identifies potential end states so that policymakers can understand which possibilities are both desirable and achievable given national objectives and inevitable resource and political constraints. Strategic, operational, and even tactical choices must be informed by an understanding of what outcomes are preferred and achievable. The entire range of potential end states, from good to bad, must be explored. Decision makers must know what they should seek to avoid as well as what they seek to achieve.

Alternative End States (ordered from most desirable to least desirable)

1. Best of All Worlds. In this end state the United States and its coalition allies defeat all terrorists and their state supporters quickly and with few long-term political, diplomatic or military costs. Indeed, the war on terror might even present opportunities for resolving long standing U.S. foreign policy problems unrelated to the immediate 11 September attacks, including Saddam Hussein's continued rule over Iraq, the anti-American stance of Iran, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The war on terror might also strengthen existing alliances (e.g., NATO) and allow useful new security arrangements to develop. For example, with the on-again, off-again rapprochement between the United States and Russia there is preliminary evidence that this is already happening. By definition, this end state highlights benefits rather than costs, even though those costs may be significant.
2. Terrorism and State Supporters of Terrorism Defeated. This end state is less favorable than the first because although state sponsors of terrorism and terrorist groups with global reach are eliminated, success comes at a greater price and long standing problems remain unresolved. There may be significant political, diplomatic, and economic costs associated with achieving U.S. war objectives as well as some undesirable unintended consequences. Specific costs might include alienating existing allies and weakening U.S. moral authority within the international community. Unintended consequences might include delays in modernizing U.S. military forces (as defense budgets focus on operational vice transformational efforts) and/or damage to the global economy for a significant period.
3. Terrorism Defeated. By eliminating known terrorist groups, threats to the American homeland, U.S. interests and facilities abroad, and perhaps to key U.S. allies will have been reduced. Terrorists with the global reach necessary to strike at the American homeland, including Al Qaeda and similar groups, will no longer exist. Accepting this end state would mean that states that aided and abetted terrorist groups would remain in place. It also implies that state supported terrorism or new terrorist groups might re-emerge in the future. This end state suggests the achievement of a more narrow set of objectives than is required for accomplishing either of the first two outcomes
4. State Supporters of Terrorism Defeated but Not Terrorist Groups. The U.S. armed forces and intelligence agencies are currently best suited to confront states and their militaries. Historically, American security structures have not been focused on terrorist groups because, in general, states have posed the greatest threat to U.S. interests. As a result there is some danger that in the war on terror the United States will defeat any and all states that support terrorist groups but will not be able to eradicate the terrorists themselves. Already Afghanistan's Taliban regime has been toppled but Al Qaeda and its leaders have not yet been eliminated as threats. Reports suggest that Al Qaeda and pro-Taliban elements remain active in parts of Afghanistan; other elements have apparently fled to other countries with the help of Iran and/or some factions within Pakistan.
5. Restore Status Quo Prior to 11 September. In the post-Cold War period the United States has operated in a world in which terrorists with global reach and state sponsors

thrived. Key allies as well as the United States itself were victimized at Khobar Towers, the port of Aden, and elsewhere. Responses were limited and some states turned a blind eye toward anti-American terrorism as a matter of policy. Many commentators have claimed that the 11 September attacks represent a seminal event that has changed history; in effect they argue that there is no going back. Given the demonstrated (no longer theoretical) threat to the American homeland and to civilian non-combatants their claims are reasonable. It is not clear that the United States can return to the pre-11 September status quo even if it wanted to.

6. Status Quo. In this end state, the 11 September attacks would be acknowledged as part of the cost of doing business for a superpower. There would be no continuing, long-term war on terror as currently envisioned. The United States would treat the 11 September attacks as a larger version of Khobar Towers and USS Cole incidents. Domestic law enforcement and international intelligence capabilities would be used to find the “criminals” who perpetrated the September 11 terrorist attacks. Externally, the United States would use political and diplomatic channels to gain the cooperation of any states found to have harbored the perpetrators with the intention of bring them to justice in a court of law. Success or failure in these endeavors would be less important than following a familiar process and adhering to a particular set of principles (the rule of law, for example).

7. Permanent State of War. This “end state” is not really an end state per se because it implies that the war on terror will not come to conclusion. It involves ongoing and prolonged conflicts with both terrorist groups and their state supporters. The war will be nasty, brutish, and long—a new Thirty Years War. It might involve a perpetual tit-for-tat relationship between the United States and its coalition allies and terrorist groups and their state sponsors. Given the nature of the terrorist threat, it could also mean accepting some permanent level of risk to the American homeland and/or trading freedom for greater security. One or more state-on-state conflicts involving conventional forces and even missions requiring military long-term occupations might occur in this end state. Nation-building may become a larger component of U.S. foreign policy because the United States may have to provide economic and governance assistance to those countries whose regimes have been overthrown and/or where large-scale socio-economic disruptions continue. This option would be the most costly to the United States and the most dangerous to ordinary Americans and to American interests writ large.

8. America "Loses." There remains the possibility that the United States could "lose" the war, not by being defeated on the battlefield but by withdrawing into a "Fortress America." An American withdrawal from the war would be a victory for Al Qaeda and its supporters. After all, one of the avowed aims of Al Qaeda (and of some other terrorist groups as well) is to drive the United States out of the Greater Middle East. A U.S. withdrawal would also undermine key regional allies and weaken U.S. economic interests abroad. Such a future might emerge if the war drags on and the U.S. public (and key political leaders) tire of wartime sacrifices. Support for the war effort could erode if the perceived economic and political costs of the war are great. Heavy military casualties might also reduce the willingness of some to continue the campaign against terrorists.

Paradoxically, the more successful the United States is in defending its homeland against terrorist attacks the more likely it is that some will argue for returning home; according to this logic, America's involvement in the world, including making the world safe from terrorists, is a source of trouble that should, and can, be avoided.

Recommendations/Actions : In adjusting U.S. war objectives in response to events, and in the natural evolution of objectives from the short to the long term, decision makers, both civilian and military must clarify which end state is both desirable and feasible.