



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
Newport, Rhode Island

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Newport Paper: 06

WHAT IS THE KIND OF WAR UPON WHICH WE ARE EMBARKING?

Purpose: To better understand the nature of the terror war.

Background: Understanding the nature of the war upon which we are embarking is a matter of great importance if we are to fight purposefully, with maximal efficiency and effectiveness, and at the lowest possible cost. Arguably, one of the great problems that bedeviled the United States during the war in Vietnam was that we fought the war we *could* fight, even the war we *preferred* to fight, rather than the war we actually had on our hands.

Discussion: To comprehend the nature of any war is not easy, for no war has a nature that is freestanding and can be "discovered" like a vein of silver in the earth. This is so because the nature of a war is determined by the interaction of the belligerents. The enemy is not an inanimate object, but possesses an active, adaptive will. Since both sides can adapt and change, the kind of war we will be fighting will not necessarily remain constant but will be mutable and may change as conditions change.

We must first ask "Who are our enemies?" Although the rhetorical necessity for describing the current conflict as "a war against terrorism" is obvious, doing so does not clarify what our objectives are. Terrorism is a means and a tactic, not an "enemy." Moreover, it is not the case that the United States has always been unalterably opposed to terrorist tactics. During the American Revolution, the British condemned the activities of colonial militias as a species of terrorism, just as the Gestapo denounced the sabotage of the Resistance in occupied France. It may therefore be more accurate to say that we are in a war against the terrorists themselves. But again, which ones? Just those associated with Bin Laden? All of those with global reach? Are we at war with the states that may have had a role in the attacks of September 11? With all states that give even indirect assistance to terrorist organizations in the modern world? Should we deal with these adversaries simultaneously or sequentially?

We must also ask what our enemies want. What are they attempting to achieve? Grasping the enemy's political objectives is fundamental to an evaluation of his strategy. What does he perceive to be our critical vulnerabilities? Alternately, does he believe that we have a center of gravity, and if so, what does he think it is, and how might he seek to attack it?

We must ask similar questions about ourselves. What do we want to achieve in this war? What is our desired end state, the outcome at which we aim? What conditions must prevail for this outcome to exist? What sort of "peace" do we envision at the end of this

war, and how sustainable will it be? The responses to these questions that we and our adversaries develop will shape the war upon which we are embarking.

Although we do not, and can not, yet have answers to all of these questions, in view of the stated policies of the administration to date we can be confident that the war on which we are embarking will manifest the following five characteristics.

(1) Not a "Normal" War. This war is neither about control of territory nor dominion over economic resources, any more than it is a traditional contest for political hegemony. Although it is in many respects an ideological conflict, and the belligerents possess distinct ideologies, they do not agree at all about what sort of ideological conflict this is, or what precisely is at stake. In this respect it is fundamentally different from such previous ideological conflicts as the Cold War, which both sides understood as a duel between democratic capitalism and communism. No such consensus now exists. To our present enemies (or at least Al Qaeda) the war is a religious war, or a war that must rapidly be transformed into a religious war, one that pits true Islam against godlessness and unbelief. But to the United States this is exactly what the current war *is not*, and must not be allowed to become. On one level, of course, the United States is fighting in self-defense, to protect its citizens and way of life. But on a deeper level the U.S. administration clearly views the war as a battle between a world view that stresses freedom, justice, tolerance and the rule of law and one that advocates theocratic tyranny, applauds mass murder, and justifies itself through the perversion and distortion of religion. This suggests that one of the most important aspects of the terror war may be the struggle to define the meaning of the war, and to influence the way in which the war is perceived throughout the world.

(2) Homeland a Battle Zone. There is a domestic front in this war. Our enemies have brought the war to the American homeland. Indeed they have taken up residence among us; they know us and our vulnerabilities. This war will continue to encroach upon our way of life. This is especially difficult because as a maritime nation we have relied on the oceans to serve as a buffer. We have fought most of our wars "over there." We no longer have that luxury.

The dilemmas associated with home-front security pose challenges akin to those the nation confronted during the Civil War, the two world wars, and the Cold War. But in many respects our current dilemmas transcend those we have ever confronted in the past. There is every reason to believe that there will be additional terrorist attacks within the United States. Should the terrorists employ weapons of mass destruction (and it is prudent to anticipate that they will try to) the United States could be confronted with enormous casualties, both civilian and military. A U.S. military built to protect our homeland by preparing to fight abroad must now adapt to these new realities.

(3) A Long War. The war will be protracted. If we are to take the President literally, U.S. goals in this war may well be extremely ambitious: when he calls for the elimination of global terrorism, he sets the bar very high. The United States could well target not just

one terrorist group or network, but potentially dozens. Moreover, the President has also pledged action against states that harbor or support terrorists.

The duration of a war of this magnitude may well be numbered in years, or even tens of years. Maintenance of public support will be indispensable to success. This means that the U.S. government must take pains to supply the American people with "incremental dividends"—that is, tangible proof during the course of the war that progress is being made and that the United States will eventually achieve the political victory it has defined for itself. The identification of our objectives and what constitutes victory is essential. The duration of the war will also pose a challenge to the cohesion of any international coalition that the U.S. assembles. Coalitions can be weakened by disputes over policy, strategy, or both. But they can also be damaged when the passage of time magnifies perceptions of inequalities of burden and risk among coalition partners.

(4) Elusive Adversaries. The war will confront the United States with a novel and particularly challenging set of adversaries. More often than not, the United States has gone to war against states. But terrorists are non-state, transnational actors. It is therefore possible that in certain respects the present war will more closely resemble the struggle to suppress piracy in the 18th and 19th centuries than it will "traditional" interstate conflicts. However, it should be kept in mind that the arduous war against piracy eventually involved striking blows not only at the pirates themselves but also at the states that supported or tolerated them.

As the present war may be much the same, our list of adversaries may also come to include states and/or political regimes as well as terrorist cells. Insofar as that occurs the United States could find itself waging fully traditional interstate war or wars within the context of the broader war against terrorism. The war could therefore become both conventional and unconventional at the same time, and might require the United States to stage conventional and unconventional operations either simultaneously or in phased sequence.

(5) A Multi-Spectrum War. Success in this war will doubtless require the United States to employ the full spectrum of its national power: economic, diplomatic, informational, and military. Economic operations will be used to dry up the enemy's sources of funding; diplomatic operations will be employed to isolate our enemies and rally our friends; information operations will be designed to deceive the enemy and destroy his communications networks; and psychological operations will be employed to sow mistrust and discord among the terrorists, their sponsors and supporters. Such "effects based operations" as these are designed to paralyze and, consequently, defeat the enemy.

In his initial speech to the joint session of Congress the President emphasized that the war will include "dramatic strikes visible on TV and covert operations secret even in success." Thus we can envision not only air strikes against the terrorists and their bases, but also special operations against individuals and groups. Still further, since we may eventually wish to destabilize or overthrow governments implicated in supporting terrorism, conventional land and naval warfare capabilities may prove no less useful than

air warfare and special operations. It may be possible to topple the Taliban regime in Afghanistan by a combination of international isolation, psychological pressure, and covert support to resistance groups. But such expedients may not be adequate to rid Iraq of its Ba'athist despotism, should we determine that we need to do so. To accomplish such a task we would have to engage in conventional war, which could require upgrading our conventional military capabilities.

Recommendations/Actions: A comprehensive understanding of the nature of the war that has now begun will be developed in an iterative process that will depend on knowledge of our policy and strategy, the policy and strategy of our allies, the policies and strategies of our enemies, and accurate predictions about what will happen when all of these collide. Future *Newport Papers* will address these very subjects.