



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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**U.S. WAR OBJECTIVES:
NEAR, MEDIUM, AND LONG TERM**

Objective: To examine how U.S. war objectives might evolve.

Background: Numerous U.S. government officials have made it clear that they expect the war on terrorism to be protracted. As President Bush asserted, “Our determination goes beyond the immediate and the short term... We will need patience and determination in order to succeed.” It is important to maintain support for a protracted war effort. Public and allied support will help ensure that vigilance is maintained, that tolerance for sacrifices continues, and that temporary setbacks will not weaken the political will of key constituencies. Policymakers can help ensure continued awareness of the complexity of the war effort, and thus its potential length, by clearly articulating the priority assigned to particular objectives as the war unfolds over time.

Discussion: If the war on terrorism is protracted, defense planners need to think through how the priorities assigned to particular objectives may shift as the war progresses. Some objectives have a higher priority than others depending on the timeframe in question. Other objectives may shift in response to external developments such as how long Al Qaeda remains a threat, how long coalitions can be held together, and how long domestic political environments in key allies/adversaries allow sufficient cooperation with U.S. objectives. Shifts may also result from U.S. reassessments. Our understanding about what must be done, and when, will evolve.

Potential shifts in the priority assigned to specific objectives over time should be evident in our strategy for the war on terrorism. Identifying possible changes in American objectives over time will help prioritize our diplomatic, political, economic, and military efforts and facilitate appropriate shifts in the balance among the components of our effort. Although the war is unlikely to evolve in discrete stages, it is important to identify the challenges the U.S. is likely to confront in the pursuit of its objectives over the near, medium and long term, particularly if the U.S. pursues broad as well as narrow objectives.

U.S. Objectives Over Time

1. Near Term

(1) Prevent further terrorist attacks on the United States. Defending the U.S. homeland and protecting U.S. interests and forces abroad are immediate and long-haul objectives. Initially, our efforts are likely to focus on high pay-off activities against the perpetrators of the 11 September attacks; in the medium to long term our efforts are likely to be

substantially expanded. This central objective will dominate other objectives throughout the timeframes in question.

(2) Disrupt or eliminate the Al Qaeda terror network. Choices about how to accomplish this end—capturing or eliminating Osama bin Laden and the senior leadership of Al Qaeda, eliminating or disrupting funding for Al Qaeda, disrupting and eliminating state support for Al Qaeda—will influence how American objectives evolve. It is possible, if not likely, that the threat from Al Qaeda will be greatly reduced by the elimination of bin Laden himself. Alternatively, his elimination might provoke others (terrorist groups or their state supporters) to actively oppose the U.S. and/or create more long term adversaries through his martyrdom. The success or failure of early efforts to accomplish this objective will determine whether it continues to be a primary objective over the medium and long term.

(3) Defeat terrorist groups with global reach. In the early stages of the war this broad objective is likely to be assigned lower priority than eliminating Al Qaeda. The demonstrated capacities of Al Qaeda far outstrip those of other terrorist groups with global reach. If other groups demonstrate such a capacity, our calculus could change. However, it may be difficult to take on all transnational terrorist organizations simultaneously; a sequential approach may be more feasible. The United States may be best served by tracking and disrupting the activities of these organizations in the near term while preparing to eliminate them in the future.

(4) Terminate state support for terrorist groups with global reach. With the exception of overthrowing the Taliban regime, the elimination of regimes that support terrorist groups with global reach is likely to be pushed into the future. Marshalling the resources (both material and political) for eliminating regimes that support transnational terrorists will take time and preparation. A sequential approach may be less risky than parallel, global engagement. Choices about which regimes might be targeted and how they might be handled will depend in large part on their behavior during our effort to eliminate Al Qaeda. Coercion of suspect regimes, however, is likely to continue as necessary throughout the war on terror.

(5) Ensure regional order and stability. Order and stability will not be restored immediately. Disorder and instability may even increase in the near term. The restoration of regional order and stability will require a sustained effort and significant resources. There are limits to what the United States and its coalition partners will be able to do in the near term. While the provision of humanitarian assistance may help mitigate some of the adverse consequences of the events that have been set in motion, the restoration of order and stability is an objective that can be expected to be assigned a higher priority over the medium to long term.

2. Medium Term

(1) Prevent further terrorist attacks on the United States. This objective will remain in place indefinitely. The priority assigned to this objective should not be diminished in the

medium term even in the possible absence of further catastrophic attacks on the U.S. homeland. The danger is that the public, law enforcement agencies, the armed services, and intelligence agencies become complacent in the wake of initial success. During this time the U.S. should deepen the capacity to prevent further attacks by ensuring that the requisite resources, human capital, and intergovernmental cooperation are devoted to homeland security and by improving intelligence capabilities, especially HUMINT, and mechanisms for sharing intelligence among our allies and coalition partners.

(2) Disrupt or eliminate the Al Qaeda terror network. Al Qaeda is organized into a cell structure that is highly resistant to disruption and elimination. "Sleeper" agents who have burrowed into our society, and those of our allies and coalition partners, are likely to remain at large. Overt and covert operations to keep the pressure on the remaining cells and individual members of Al Qaeda are likely to continue during the medium term, and perhaps into the long term as well. If we are successful in our efforts, the focus is likely to shift to preventing Al Qaeda's revival through the recruitment of new members, the transfer of its members or capabilities to other terrorist groups, or the emergence of another "bin Laden-like" charismatic leader.

(3) Disrupt or eliminate terrorist groups with global reach. Success against Al Qaeda may enable us to move more aggressively against other transnational terrorist groups in the medium and long term. The success of the campaign against terrorists with global reach may well be even more dependent upon international support than the campaign against Al Qaeda. Coalition maintenance, however, may become more difficult as the U.S. shifts from a campaign against the perpetrators of the 11 September attacks to transnational terrorists generally. The difficulties of maintaining support should not be underestimated. Defections by individual states are likely. The processes and institutions by which international support and resources can be maintained and employed in the war against terror will require greater attention. Building "coalitions of the willing" outside familiar institutional contexts (e.g., NATO) may help preserve U.S. flexibility in the face of multiple but perhaps less well-defined terrorist threats. It may also be advantageous to expand the mandate and capabilities of international organizations for fighting international terrorism. Building a sustainable UN majority to support future U.S.-led coalitions for the war on terrorism could also be beneficial.

(4) Terminate state support for terrorist groups with global reach. As other objectives are achieved, it will be possible to devote greater attention to state support for international terrorist groups—beyond that provided by the Taliban for Al Qaeda. The challenges posed by a broad campaign against the state supporters of terrorism mirror those posed by a campaign against transnational terrorist groups. Gaining consensus on which states should be held accountable for supporting terrorist groups will be difficult. Actually achieving coalition support to move against those states will be even harder.

(5) Ensure regional order and stability. Fostering regional order and stability is a tall order. The challenge of rebuilding the failed and failing states that play host to transnational terrorist organizations is likely to emerge full-blown during the medium term and endure into the long term. Frontline states in the war on terrorism are likely to

require continued diplomatic, political, economic, and military assistance. New regional security organizations and/or alliances may be necessary. Their foundations must be laid during the near and medium term if they are to develop over the long haul.

3. Long Term

The evolution of the priorities assigned to U.S. objectives—the shift in emphasis from narrower to broader objectives—and the challenges entailed in achieving them can be expected to continue. The further ahead we attempt to look, however, the less reliable will be our efforts to anticipate the future. Discussion of the long term is also hampered by the impossibility of assigning a timeline to "the long term." Finally, unanticipated events, or wild cards, could wreck havoc on timelines for achieving our objectives. Examples of potential **wild cards** include:

- ?? The discovery and public acknowledgement that other states (e.g., Iraq) directly aided Al Qaeda in its attacks of 11 September;
- ?? A WMD attack on the U.S. homeland or its facilities and/or forces abroad;
- ?? A WMD attack on the homeland or forces of a coalition member;
- ?? A collapse of the Pakistani state that leaves its nuclear weapons unaccounted for;
- ?? Escalation of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, especially if accompanied by intervention by another state such as Syria or Egypt;
- ?? An attempt by a major power, perhaps even a regional power, to take advantage of the U.S. preoccupation with the war on terrorism;
- ?? A severe disruption in the flow of oil from Southwest Asia;
- ?? The loss of a critical coalition partner (e.g., Great Britain, Saudi Arabia or Russia);
- ?? A massive operational failure by the United States and/or its coalition partners;
- ?? The United States and/or its coalition partners sustain a high level of casualties.

Recommendations/Actions: Policymakers must be attuned to how the priorities assigned to U.S. objectives might evolve and to the challenges that may arise as they attempt to accomplish those objectives over time.