Scoring the Long War

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The score for the Long War can look very different depending on which scorecard is used. Emphasis is currently placed on historically-based, quantifiable, state-versus-state measures which attempt to correlate *what* we are doing with *how* we are doing. But the current fight against al-Qaeda is not a state-versus-state war and requires a different metrics that more accurately depict who is winning and who is losing.

Introduction

The score for the Long War can look very different depending on which scorecard is used. Each side has its own set of metrics – measures of effectiveness (MOE) – for keeping score, metrics that often paint a self-serving picture of the realities on the war's various battlefields. Even within each side, different groups can, and do, have scorecards that look very different from one another. One needs look no further than the United States' (US) political arena, especially in this past election year, to find a broad spectrum of views on the US performance in the war.

In media headlines and decision making circles throughout the US government and military, great emphasis is placed on quantifiable measures like body counts, troop surge numbers, weapons expended, enemy leadership targeted, etc. US decision makers routinely use and advertise these MOE; MOE derived from traditional, state versus state, third-generation warfare.[i] These measures attempt to correlate *what* we are doing with *how* we are doing. But traditional MOE do not address the reality that we are not fighting a third-generation war. The current fight against al-Qaeda is a fourth-generation war[ii] and requires a different set of MOE that more accurately depict who is winning and who is losing.

While judging US performance in this fourth-generation war using third-generation metrics seems to be an obviously inappropriate way to score the Long War, we suggest the problem with this approach hides a larger, more troubling issue. By focusing on the wrong US measures of success, we completely miss the point that the enemy – al-Qaeda – is busy achieving its goals. To the degree that al-Qaeda is succeeding, the US is losing the Long War.

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Given the proposed inadequacy of the current MOE, perhaps an enemy-centric approach can better illuminate the current battlefield reality. Proceeding from an enemy-centric point of view, judging al-Qaeda success in the Long War may reveal some insight on how the US can better prosecute the Long War. We argue that by comparing al-Qaeda's stated goals to their ability to prosecute these strategies, we can quickly determine the state of the Long War.

In order to determine the state of the Long War, we will first list the al-Qaeda goals – their MOE – then explore al-Qaeda's ability to operate in accordance with these stated goals. In order to yield insight into possible US counter-strategy, a brief case study from Iraq will be used to articulate what losing looks like for the enemy, paying particular attention to those measures that could potentially put al-Qaeda squarely in the 'loss' column.

Al-Qaida Measures of Effectiveness

While the number of al-Qaeda statements and fatwas spans the strategic, operational and tactical arenas, we have chosen to focus on five strategic goals espoused by al-Qaeda's senior leadership. Four of the five goals predate the Long War. All five have been articulated by al Qaida senior leadership. These strategic goals come from the 1996 and 1998 fatwas issued against the US and Israel, as well as various press statements issued by Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. In short, al-Qaeda demands:

1. US forces leave the Islamic Holy Land – specifically Saudi Arabia – the "land of the Two Holy Places";[iii]
2. US forces no longer present in the Middle East;[iv,v]
3. US and Zionist (Israeli) forces cease to interfere in Islamic business;[vi]
4. Establishment of an Islamic Caliphate ruled by Shari'a Law.[vii] This presupposes the overthrow of 'illegitimate sovereigns' currently in power in the Middle East (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, etc);
5. Destruction of the US by attacking economic centers. "[B]leeding America to the point of bankruptcy"[viii] and "plundering their [the US] money"[ix] by utilization of the provocation effect to start the Long War and the demonstration effect throughout Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom (OIF and OEF).

How successful is al-Qaeda in its current strategies?

As Henry Kissinger ruefully noted regarding US strategic struggles in Vietnam, "In the process, we lost sight of one of the cardinal maxims of guerrilla war: the guerrilla wins if he does not lose. The conventional army loses if it does not win."[x] In the case of

the Long War, al-Qaeda has the luxury of operating as guerrillas. Thus, while al-Qaeda may appear to be losing by conventional US MOE, an honest assessment of the Long War must keep in mind that in not losing, al-Qaeda can continue to spread its virulent version of Islam while the US must win in order to stop this spread.

As noted earlier, al-Qaeda's strategic goals can be used as MOE for an enemy-centric scorecard for the Long War. Thus, an examination of al-Qaeda's ability to operate according to preferred strategies is warranted. If the US is truly winning the Long War, then al-Qaeda will be unable to further the group's strategic aims. If, on the other hand, al-Qaeda is able to further their strategic aims, we argue the US is likely not following a winning strategy and should alter course in order to maximize success.

Perhaps the best indicator of al-Qaeda success is its ability to prosecute the strategy of 'bleeding America dry.'[xi] From the start of the Long War in 2001 through early FY 2009, the total cost of OIF and OEF (comprised of operations throughout the world, including not only Afghanistan, but also the Philippines, Africa, and SE Asia) is roughly $864 billion USD.[xii] Projected costs, assuming the conflict continues through 2018, range from over $1 trillion USD to as much as $3 trillion USD[xiii] when all costs of the Long War, including equipment recapitalization and veteran's benefits.

The indirect economic impact of the Long War is more difficult to measure, but just as important, including economic friction imposed by more onerous restrictions on the transport of people, goods and capital. The creation of the Department of Homeland Security alone has led to an increase in public and private homeland security cost increases of approximately $34 billion USD from 2001 through 2005.[xiv]

One way to put the above statistics in perspective is to examine total cost relative to other major conflicts in our history and to compare these costs as both absolute values and percentages relative to GDP for the duration of the respective conflicts. In order to limit the scope of this analysis, we compare the most expensive war in US history, World War II, with the current conflict. In absolute terms, World War II cost approximately $5 trillion USD, adjusted for inflation.[xv] This represents approximately 38% of GDP for the period 1941-1945.[xvi] The corresponding outlays for the Long War are approximately 1% of GDP.[xvii] When expanded to include all defense spending, this figure rises to 4% of GDP through 2005.[xviii]

Thus, while the economic cost is undoubtedly high, and climbing by $9-12 billion USD per month,[xix] the current conflict is not radically out of line with historical comparisons. However, the al-Qaeda strategy has one important feature that World War II lacked: the Long War has no clear end. Even according to conventional MOE, the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are still contentious with no clear winner and significant al-Qaeda presence in both theaters. The duration of the conflict is thus

unknown and using pure cost as a benchmark may only serve to reassure conventional thinkers that the current US strategy is neither unusually costly, nor is the cost of the war a key feature of al-Qaeda's most recently adopted line of operation.

Put another way, with each dollar spent in World War II, some measurable progress against the enemy could be charted. In the current conflict, each dollar spent appears to have some impact tactically and operationally with the kill or capture of targeted individuals. At the strategic level, however, that correlation becomes far less clear. The ideological draw of al-Qaeda has not been stemmed; in fact, the Council on Foreign Relations asserts the Iraqi component of the Long War has become a powerful recruiting tool for al-Qaeda.[xx] Thus, funding for the Long War may actually be counterproductive at the strategic level while seductively providing continued hope at the tactical level.

Turning to another stratagem, al-Qaeda has insisted on the removal of US forces from Saudi Arabia and the greater Islamic world. These are related to the demand that the US and Israel must cease interference with the affairs of the Muslim world. Interestingly, the US has actually made some significant steps toward al-Qaeda accommodation in this demand. For example, the April 2003 announcement of the removal of US military personnel from Saudi Arabia to Qatar[xxi] essentially removed one of the major points of contention for al-Qaeda – a perceived US (infidel) occupation of the most holy lands in all of Islam. Though most major news outlets carried the announcement, this message was lost just two weeks later when the bombings of three American residential compounds signaled a profound statement by al-Qaeda reasserting its demand for all US citizens – military and civilian – leave the entire Muslim world.[xxii]

The withdrawal of forces and subsequent targeting of American citizens reveals two critical points. First, the apparent lack of a strategic communications plan focused on shaping perceptions in the Muslim world ceded important ground to al-Qaeda in the information war. This phenomenon can be seen anecdotally in the rate with which the US falls behind in the information war with al-Qaeda's media branch – as-Shahab. A focused effort communicating the US effort to partially accommodate al-Qaeda demands – regardless of intent – would reap dividends with the target audience. The lack of communication sensitive to the cultural norms in the Muslim world merely reinforced al-Qaeda ideology of the US as 'crusaders' with 'Zionist' conspirators.

The second point is the attack, which followed the removal of military forces, targeting American citizens and other western civilians. Al-Qaeda's choice of targets should not be surprising given bin Ladin's 1998 fatwa, which specifically directed targeting civilians and key economic targets to expand the modern jihad. Al-Qaeda

sees 'the enemy' in very different relief than does the US. That al-Qaeda targeted civilians in response to an apparent military accommodation is indicative of a philosophy of jihadi 'Total War.'

Additionally, these points are not separable. The US response to the May 2003 bombings was predictable in its lack of strategic coherence. The reaction of US leaders was, essentially, to do more of the same: kill or capture al-Qaeda operatives in an effort to bring them to justice.[xxiii] Al-Qaeda will continue to conduct these kinds of attacks until the support infrastructure that enables them is removed. Furthermore, until the US incorporates weapons in the war of ideas, with resonance in the Muslim world to destroy the ideology of al-Qaeda, the support base for al-Qaeda will remain largely intact.

The final goal of al-Qaeda under consideration is the formation of a new Islamic caliphate governed by Shari'a law (see Fig 1).[xxiv]
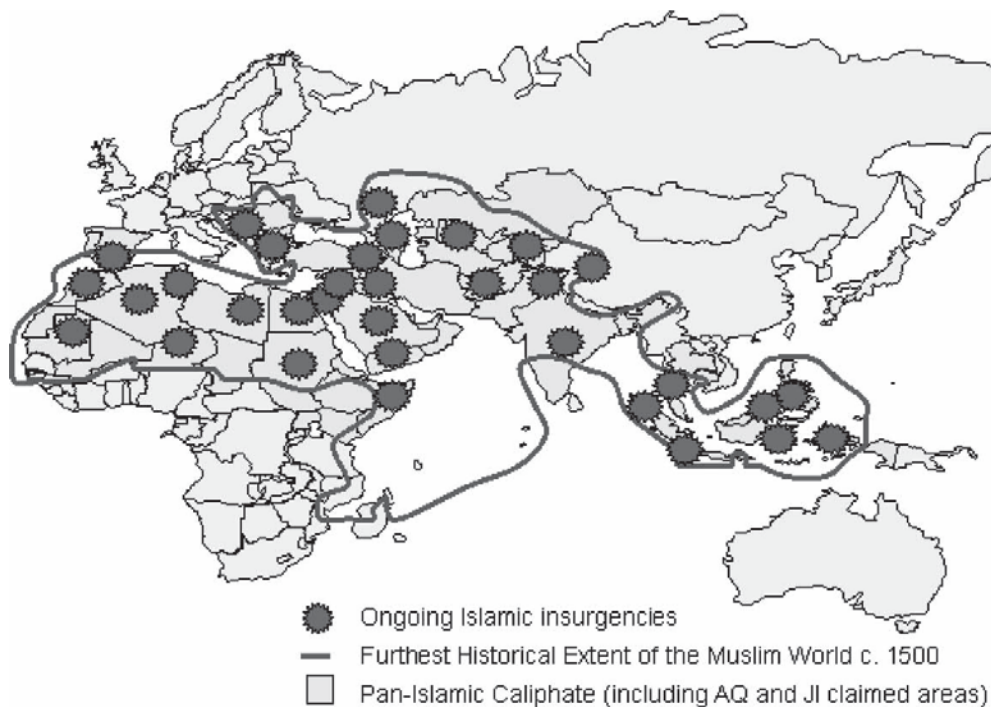

Figure 1. Insurgencies, Terrorism and the Caliphate.[xxv]

Al-Qaeda's failure to establish such a form of governance speaks to the group's inability to effectively organize to hold ground and create the bureaucratic institutions required to govern the amount of territory envisioned in the caliphate. This is the most 'conventional' al-Qaeda goal and, as such, puts the group in an environment for which it is fundamentally unprepared to operate. Ironically, this goal of the al-Qaeda subordinate, al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQIZ), was one significant factor in the US ability to

effectively target and reduce AQIZ operational capability. AQIZ' worst mistake appears to have been a dramatic overreach in ambitions which were not well received by the Sunni population which for so many months provided critical support to AQIZ. This phenomenon will be analyzed in greater detail in the next section, but we conclude with the irony that al-Qaeda's only real 'loss' in this war of ideas came when it tried to operate conventionally.

This is an important lesson in how to effectively engage al-Qaeda. To the degree that each side loses when engaging in strategic asymmetry, the US should rapidly analyze and assume a mirror imaging of the current enemy to significantly improve its chances of victory in a conflict that for over seven years has been decidedly one-sided.[xxvi]

What Does Losing Look Like for al-Qaeda?

Al-Qaeda must be perceived as the inferior option in the eyes of their constituency. In order to discredit the movement strategically, it must be defeated tactically until the non-hardcore followers are disillusioned with al-Qaeda's message. This disillusionment has begun in Iraq where the US military has been able to take advantage of AQIZ miscalculations of indiscriminate targeting of Shi'a and Sunni Muslims.

Prior to September 2006, however, US military units in Ramadi had:
> ...inconsistently and excessively applied force, focused operations on killing and capturing insurgents, reduced support to local security forces before they were capable of controlling and protecting the population independently, attempted to gain intelligence through detain and release tactics, and conducted operations from consolidated Forward Operating Bases located outside of the city.[xxvii]

In short, these actions were focused on traditional US MOE, which served to isolate the Iraqi population and forced it to reluctantly align with AQIZ. Emboldened by its successes in al-Anbar Province, AQIZ publicly "declared Ramadi the future capital of its 'caliphate' in Iraq."[xxviii] By early 2006, Ramadi was considered by many observers effectively under AQIZ control. The US military was relegated to operating out of Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) in north-central and north-west Ramadi, "…coalition operations in Ramadi had originated from large FOBs on the outskirts of town, with most forces conducting 'drive-by COIN' (or combat) – they exited the FOB, drove to an objective or patrolled, were attacked, exchanged fire, and returned to base."[xxix] This tactic forced the population to choose between overbearing American occupiers or extreme Islamic ideologues.

With a lack of US or Iraqi police presence in Ramadi, AQIZ gained the support of the city through intimidation and coercion. By the end of the summer 2006, US military commanders in Ramadi realized the local tribes were isolated, under duress, and being manipulated by AQIZ. The US commanders then sought to remedy the situation.

In September 2006, a young visionary Sunni Sheik, Sittar Albu-Risha, began the al-Anbar Awakening Movement – with the support of other influential Sheiks – in order to rid Ramadi of AQIZ influence.[xxx] With the help and partnership of the al-Anbar Awakening, the US military began implementing urban-centric counter insurgency techniques by moving company-sized units outside of the FOBs to engage AQIZ strongholds in the city, while also establishing hardened and permanent Combat Outposts. This enabled the Iraqi Police to establish a footprint at the Ramadi neighborhood level and drive AQIZ out. Once areas were secured, the US military began implementing discriminate 'soft hits' when raiding houses in and around the city. This technique enabled the US to be viewed as protectors rather than overbearing occupiers.

The Iraqi Police now conducts all operations in Ramadi with US troops supporting. The fact that, in most cases, the Iraqi Police work in their own neighborhoods significantly increases their tactical and operational knowledge of the criminal and insurgent elements in those neighborhoods. Once neighborhoods were secured, US troops constructed Civil Military Operations Centers to begin rebuilding the neighborhood through local contractors. In addition, influential Sheiks, vital to al-Anbar's security, were given funding through US Provincial Reconstruction Teams in order to rebuild their tribal areas and were made "…conduits for humanitarian aid efforts, such as free fuel disbursements."[xxxi] This combination of aid to aligned Sheiks greatly strengthened their 'wasta' with their constituency.

Through a series of tactical changes, an aggressive counterinsurgency campaign, and partnership with the Awakening Movement, the population turned against AQIZ in al-Anbar and elsewhere in Iraq (Baghdad, al-Diyala Province, etc.). This hindered al-Qaeda's ability to influence and control the population, reducing recruitment. Without the protection of the population, AQIZ lost its ability to blend in with the locals.

"Tactical victory became a strategic turning point when farsighted senior leaders, both Iraqi and American, replicated the Ramadi model throughout Anbar province, in Baghdad, and other parts of the country, dramatically changing the Iraq security situation in the process."[xxxii] Ultimately, the pathway to an al-Qaeda 'loss' must go through the discrediting of al-Qaeda ideology and a reduction of the appeal of the movement at the local level of non-hard core followers who perceive no alternative.

Conclusion

While the US has hampered al-Qaeda freedoms in both Iraq and Afghanistan, al-Qaeda continues to dominate the information war. Al-Qaeda fights at a time, place and method of its choosing. Often, this occurs in an economic sense or on the Internet. The battlefield is rarely kinetic. As Kissinger noted with the Viet Cong, al-Qaeda doesn't need to win, they just need to avoid losing. The US must win, yet using conventional MOE and strategies will not win a guerrilla war. It did not work in Viet Nam and it is not working in the Long War.

Of the five MOE analyzed, the US is 'winning' only one. Yet even this MOE is not the result of keen US insight, rather it is the result of strategic overreach by al-Qaeda and its surrogate AQIZ. The US can do better. By seeing the conflict through the enemy's perspective, the US must shift its efforts to an integrated, information centric approach to discredit the al-Qaeda message, highlight al-Qaeda mistakes and erode the base of popular support so critical to al-Qaeda success. This approach worked well in al-Anbar and is an approach which may enable the US to more broadly engage and defeat al-Qaeda.

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[i] For a discussion of the different generations of warfare, see John Robb's *Brave New War* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2007) , 22-24. We mean third-generation warfare as the Wehrmacht's development of Blitzkrieg during World War II, whose objective is "to take down an enemy army and state through maneuver, deep penetration, and disruption" (22).

[ii] See John Robb, *Brave New War*.

[iii] PBS, "Bin Laden's Fatwa," *Online NewsHour*, PBS.org, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1996.html (accessed on October, 23 2008).

[iv] Ibid.

[v] PBS, "Al Qaeda's Fatwa," *Online NewsHour*, PBS.org, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1998.html (accessed October 23, 2008).

[vi] See PBS, "Bin Laden's Fatwa."

[vii] FBIS, "Compilation of Usama bin Ladin Statements: 1994-January 2004," *FBIS Report*, January 2004, 41-48, http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ubl-fbis.pdf (accessed November 2, 2008).

[viii] CNN, "Bin Laden: Goal is to Bankrupt U.S.," *CNN.com*, http://www.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/11/01/binladen.tape (accessed October 25, 2008).

[ix] See PBS, "Al Qaeda's Fatwa."

[x] Henry A. Kissinger, "The Viet Nam Negotiations," *Foreign Affairs* 47, no. 2 (January 1969): 214, http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=4&hid=112&sid=0e6ef99c-bce7-4f4a-a976-f8589fb66bc0%40sessionmgr102.

xi CNN, "Bin Laden: Goal is to Bankrupt U.S."

xii Congressional Research Service, "The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11," October 15, 2008, http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL33110.pdf (accessed October 30, 2008).

xiii Zachary Coile, "Only World War II was costlier than Iraq War," San Francisco Chronicle online edition, March 18, 2008, http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/03/17/MNBVVL9GK.DTL, (accessed October 31, 2008).

xiv Bart Hobijn and Erick Sager, "What has Homeland Security Cost? An Assessment: 2001-2005," *Current Issues in Economics and Finance: Federal Reserve Bank of New York* 13, no. 2 (February 2007): 1-7, http://www.newyorkfed.org/research/current_issues/ci13-2.pdf (accessed November 2, 2008).

xv Coile, "Only World War II Costlier."

xvi David R. Francis, "More Costly than the War to End All Wars," *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 29, 2005, http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0829/p15s01-cogn.html (accessed November 1, 2008).

xvii U.S. Department of Commerce, "National Income and Product Amounts Table," *Bureau of Economic Analysis*, http://www.bea.gov/national/nipaweb/TableView.asp?SelectedTable=5&FirstYear=2007&LastYear=2008&Freq=Qtr (accessed October 27, 2008).

xviii Francis, "More Costly than the War to End All Wars."

xix Congressional Research Service, "The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan."

xx Eben Kaplan, "The Rise of al-Qaedaism," *The Council on Foreign Relations*, July 18, 2007, http://www.cfr.org/publication/11033 (accessed November 1, 2008).

xxi Fox News, "U.S. Begins Moving Military Out of Saudi Arabia," *Fox News Online Edition*, April 29, 2003, http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,85446,00.html (accessed November 1, 2008).

xxii CNN, "Bush Points to al Qaeda Role in Saudi Bombings," *CNN.com*, May 13, 2003, http://edition.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/05/13/bush.day/index.html (accessed November 2, 2008).

xxiii Several news stories illuminate this point. The predictable response was the prescribed solution to al-Qaeda – if only the US had killed more al-Qaeda central leadership, the bombings in May 2003 would not have happened. We argue this response misses a key point, al-Qaeda's objective for the attack and the lack of a coherent US plan for destroying the *ideology* of al-Qaeda, not its leaders, are intertwined. To the degree the US has no weapons in the war of ideas, al-Qaeda is free to pursue its plan to remove *all* US presence from the Muslim world. Official US reaction: http://edition.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/05/13/bush.day/index.html (accessed November 1, 2008) and http://edition.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/05/13/bombings.reax/index.html (accessed November 1, 2008).

xxiv David J. Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 4 (August 2004): 599, https://nps.blackboard.com/ (accessed November 2, 2008).

xxv Patterns of Global Terrorism 2004, "Insurgencies, Terrorism and the Caliphate," http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/*rs143/map6.jpg (accessed November 2, 2008).

xxvi Ivan Arreguin-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict," *International Security* 26, no. 1 (Summer 2004): 93-128, https://nps.blackboard.com/ (accessed November 2, 2008).

xxvii J. D. Broemmel, S. E. Nielsen, and T. L. Clark, "An Analysis of Counterinsurgency in Iraq: Mosul, Ramadi and Samarra from 2003-2005," Thesis, Naval Post Graduate School, 2006, 109, http://bosun.nps.edu/uhtbin/hyperion-image.exe/06Dec_Broemmel.pdf (accessed November 2, 2008).

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[xxix] Ibid., 45.

[xxx] Ibid., 47-48.

[xxxi] Ibid., 43-44.

[xxxii] Ibid., 41.