

The Bush administration's attempts to portray the War in Iraq as the main front in the War on Terror have become self-fulfilling prophecy. Iraq--like 1980s Afghanistan--has drawn foreign fighters eager to bleed an overextended superpower and acquire valuable combat experience. Because of the global media's fixation on Iraq, it has become the defining symbol of America's violent encounter with Islam. Because of this, it is difficult to predict what form the War on Terror will take when America leaves Iraq.

The term "War on Terror" has come to encompass many different contradictory conflicts: the civil war raging in Iraq, Al-Qaeda's global insurgency, NATO's efforts to stabilize Afghanistan, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Hezbollah's efforts to gain power in Lebanon, Islamic insurgencies in Indonesia, Somalia, Chechnya, Thailand, and the Philippines, and the traditional state-centric threat posed by Iran and North Korea's nuclear ambitions--all now come under the rubric of the War on Terror.

Which conflicts fit under this definition and the meaning of those struggles is at this point entirely determined by ideology. Even calling it the War on Terror is biased, because it legitimates the Bush Administration's argument that the United States is locked in a transnational war that encompasses *all* of the scattered conflicts listed above--a view not shared by many. Likewise, predictions of what will come after Iraq have often been determined by ideology and American domestic politics.

Many on the American right warn that Iraq will become a base for terrorists if the U.S. withdraws before "victory" is achieved and predict that "emboldened" terrorists will strike inside America again. The political left and center point to Afghanistan as the main front of the struggle against terrorism and emphasize the dire consequences of allowing the resurgent Taliban to win. Neoconservatives warn of Iran's nuclear programs and alleged arming of Shiite militias. All, or none, of these ideas may be right.

However, it is clear that the next phase in the deadly struggle between the United States and radical Islam will be more than simply a repetition of the last six years. Both Al Qaeda and the American military are training to fight a very different kind of conflict. According to the Jamestown Foundation, a Syrian member of Al-Qaeda, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, has formulated a new operational strategy growing in popularity among global jihadists<sup>1</sup>. The plan's primary feature is radical decentralization. In al-Suri's opinion, the biggest mistake that the jihadi movement made was to grow dependent on fixed camps, like the ones Bin Laden maintained in Sudan and Afghanistan<sup>2</sup>. Although useful in training recruits, fixed locations trapped Al-Qaeda units where Western forces could eventually invade and destroy them. Similarly, al-Suri also sees the traditional hierarchal model of a terrorist or insurgent group as a weakness. If authorities capture one member, the organization as a whole is put at risk<sup>3</sup>.

Instead, al-Suri proposes a "jihad of individual terrorism," with self-contained autonomous cells employing an easily available (most likely on the internet) terror "template" to start their own jihad<sup>4</sup>. The glue holding these autonomous jihadis together would simply be a common cause, with leadership offering little more than ideological guidance. There would be **no organizational links between cells**<sup>5</sup>.

Aspiring terrorists will not need to travel to far-off places to receive training but will train in their own countries--probably in safe houses, caves, and forests. The goal will not be to produce a militarily disciplined terrorist; instead, al-Suri stresses that the ideal terrorist attributes are lethal creativity and adaptability. If any training is conducted in the open, it should only be done in wartime environments where the chaos of battle provides cover. Lastly, terror operations should be mounted in the terrorist's country of residence, especially if that country's government happens to be Western or Western-backed. This comes as fears of homegrown terrorism continue to haunt America and trouble Europeans, who find themselves saddled with a rapidly radicalizing and alienated Muslim population.

Failed "shoe bomber" Richard Reid was American and the four men who bombed the London subway in 2005 were all born in Europe. Al-Qaeda spokesman Adam Gadahn hails from suburban California, like American Taliban John Walker Lindh. The Bush administration claims that many individuals, including seven young men accused of plotting to destroy the Sears Tower and, most famously, "dirty bomber" Jose Padilla have plotted to kill Americans. British Muslims have been accused of a plot to behead a British Muslim soldier and blow up ten flights over the Atlantic8.

It is important to stress, though, that homegrown terrorists are still rare in the West, and many of those accused of plotting against their country are innocents swept up in racial and political hysteria. It is also important to point out that the most effective American homegrown terrorists have been non-Al Qaeda: Timothy McVeigh, the DC snipers, the defense insider presumably behind the Anthrax scare, and "Unabomber" Ted Kaczynski. All of these were "lone wolf" terrorists who caused havoc cheaply, and this is why al-Suri's plan is likely to pose special problems for security agencies. "Lone wolves" do not have superiors or contacts who can be monitored--they are terrorists who do not leave paper trails. The Unabomber is a perfect example of this. Holed away in his cabin, he was only caught because a member of his family recognized his prose style in the rambling anti-technology manifesto he demanded that The New York Times print9. With only an ideological link connecting various individuals and cells, it will be hard to collect intelligence or predict their actions. Freed from the fear of massive retaliation, "lone wolf" jihadis, as opposed to hierarchal terrorists, insurgents, or state-supported terrorists, will also be difficult to deter.

Unlike many jihadi theorists, al-Suri is also keenly aware of the insights developed by Communist guerrilla leaders such as Che Guevara and Mao. He

explicitly recommends study of revolutionary literature in his writings, despite the blatant atheism of Marxism<sup>10</sup>. It is extremely important to al-Suri that jihadists raise the ideological consciousness of the Muslim "masses," instead of the elites and middle classes that currently compose the backbone of the global jihad<sup>11</sup>. He wants to provoke a global Muslim uprising led by autonomous cells and individual jihadists<sup>12</sup>. This may seem paradoxical--how can it really be said that the "masses" are in rebellion if the rebels do not act together?

The answer to this problem is found in the theory of Italian Marxist Antonio Negri and Duke University professor Michael Hardt. In their manifestos *Empire* and *The Multitude*, Negri and Hardt suggest Autonomist Marxism as a method for overthrowing the global capitalist system. It is not the "people" that Lenin or Mao wrote of who will storm Wall Street, but a patchwork of autonomous "multitudes" who will fight against it<sup>13</sup>. The most prominent real life example of the "multitude" is the *globalized* network of anti-globalization activists who employ the internet to organize actions against meetings of international financial organizations.

The famously eclectic quality of these protests is legendary--black block anarchists, environmentalists, pro-Palestinian groups, and working-class laborers all act at once against a common foe. They may have lacked a leader, and organizational hierarchy, and even a common ideology besides a loathing of large corporations, but together they paralyzed Seattle. Technological theorist Howard Rheingold called these networks "smart mobs"<sup>14</sup>; military theorist John Arquilla referred to it in a RAND brief as "swarming"<sup>15</sup>: these groups have no central leader but nonetheless share cause and purpose.

Al-Suri's plan does Negri and Hardt's idea one better--his self-reinforcing networks are more analogous to computer hackers communicating across the digital ether to trade expertise and modify each others' work to build the perfect virus. His autonomous cells will learn and improve on each other's actions, making each one progressively deadlier. However, unlike the Marxist "multitudes," al-Suri's networks think together but act alone. Their point of convergence is the chat room, not the police barricades. And unlike the disorganized and divided anti-globalization activists, jihadist networks will share a lethal singularity of purpose.

This dovetails with another worrisome trend: the aggressive decentralization of technology. As former Reagan defense official Fred Charles Ikle noted in his study *Annihilation From Within*, the technological revolution has weakened the power of the state, **giving individuals the possibility of projecting unheard-of power**<sup>16</sup>. This is not solely a military trend but a societal one: just as Youtube and Myspace have democratized mass media and given aspiring filmmakers and musicians creative and promotional tools once reserved for film studios and record companies, the power of marginal non-state actors to influence world events has drastically increased.

Ikle believes that the result of this vast decentralization is likely to result in two apocalyptic outcomes. Last-resort weapons once reserved for the state could fall into the hands of armed groups<sup>17</sup>. Another possibility is the military modification of emerging futuristic technologies with "dual-use" capacity, such as biotechnology, robotics, nanomachines, and artificial intelligence. Ikle predicts that non-state actors will find the means of turning these emerging technological advances into weapons of mass destruction<sup>18</sup>. If so, it would not be unusual. Human history is fraught with examples of wondrous inventions converted into weapons of war. None of the spectators watching the Wright brothers' flight in Kitty Hawk had any idea that the same flying machines would turn Guernica, London, Dresden, Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki into tableaus of horror.

Al-Suri is not the dominant strategist of the jihadi movement and it remains to be seen what influence his ideas will have; his plan is not a field manual but an intellectual treatise intended to spark discussion in jihadi circles. However, **Al-Qaeda has been moving towards decentralization ever since the invasion of Afghanistan**, with isolated cells and loosely affiliated groups that have only a tenuous connection to the greater Al-Qaeda hierarchy tapping into Bin Laden's "franchise," appropriating its ideological "brand name" for their actions. In Iraq, insurgent groups have also adopted decentralization, trading weapons, expertise, and intelligence without adopting a common command structure.

The United States Army has created a new doctrine of its own, emphasizing technology and agility. From 2001 to 2006, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld attempted to update the military to deal with a strategic and technological shift called the "Revolution in Military Affairs." Though Rumsfeld was driven out of office due to his gross mismanagement of the war in the Iraq, the military modernization program he began lives on. In 2004, President Bush announced that one-third of overseas military bases will be closed down over a ten-year period<sup>19</sup>. Replacing them will be discreet, austere, and lightly-staffed bases intended as launch points for quick deployments to local hotspots. The emerging Africa Command taking shape at the U.S. base in Djibouti is the main example of this strategic focus; it gives the American military the ability to project force throughout the Horn of Africa and the Sahel.

The U.S. military and intelligence communities, most notably the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and the National Intelligence Council's 2020 Project, recognize that **urban environments will be the focus of future conflicts**. Huge population growth continues in developing nations, packing already overcrowded slums, squatter villages, and shantytowns. These urban slums, referred to by policymakers as "global cities," have become autonomous zones, islands of disorder linked together by the world of both legitimate and illegitimate commerce. Within them, the state's authority has declined and ethnic and religious militants, criminal networks, and terrorists have filled the void.

Remembering well the nightmare of urban combat in Hue and Mogadishu, the American military in Iraq initially sought to avoid fighting in cities, where traditional conventional military power has proven ineffective. In the 2003 conventional war against Iraq, the American military attempted to leapfrog around Iraqi cities and military emplacements to quickly destroy the Iraqi central command. Fighting it out in the cities was viewed as unavoidable but still undesirable. The consequence of this attitude was an inability to prevent disorder from breaking out in captured cities.

Since the invasion, many foreign policy intellectuals have used the disorder in Iraq as a prime example of the limits of U.S. power to create security. However, some defense intellectuals, most prominently Thomas P.M. Barnett, author of *The Pentagon's New Map*, have come to the opposite conclusion: that American security will only be achieved after the neutralizing the threat posed by unstable regions he calls the "Non-Integrated Gap <sup>20</sup>."

The "Gap," composed of dysfunctional and "failed states" suffering from war, terrorism, disease, poverty, pollution, and dictatorship, generates insecurity and terrorism. Such states remain largely disconnected from the "rule sets" that govern international relations among stable nation-states. Barnett believes that America, acting in concert with other great powers, can export security to these regions, employing a global expeditionary force to forcefully deter and if necessary pacify regions within the "Gap" that pose a threat to American security. With the aid of a military-economic synthesis Barnett calls the "sysAdmin," the "Gap" can be integrated into the global economy<sup>21</sup>.

Just as it cannot stated with certainty that al-Suri's ideas are *official* Al-Qaeda doctrine, it would be erroneous to suggest that Barnett's plan is official Pentagon policy. Barnett's complex and highly original theories contradict American policy on many levels. Barnett's goal is not to preserve American hegemony, but to create a more peaceful world by shrinking the "Gap." He does not mind if doing so would lead to the rise of India or China. However, the Pentagon has taken one idea of his to heart: dysfunctional states produce terrorist threats and that a **globe-trotting**, **technologically advanced military can neutralize those threats**. And within the "Gap," "global cities" are almost always the places where hostile non-state actors are strongest. Therefore, rapid reaction forces will pacify the "global cities" with the help of a high-tech armada of heavily armed land and air-based drones<sup>22</sup>.

The Pentagon plans to wire soldiers with a complex network of computer programs and technologies designed to give them an omniscient view of the battlefield and superhuman abilities to traverse it. A host of accessories will allow soldiers greater freedom to blend into their surroundings, control crowds, and locate and isolate their targets. For example, a complicated computer algorithm will calculate which neighborhoods have a higher chance of producing resistance <sup>23</sup>. A stubby little robot on treads will use automatic target recognition to wipe out enemies with a heavy M240

machine gun<sup>24</sup>. A truck-mounted heat ray will deter rioters by inducing an intense burning sensation<sup>25</sup>.

The aim of these technological wonders is to compensate for and match the mobility and creativity of insurgents and terrorists. The Pentagon clearly sees the future of the War on Terror as an apocalyptic clash between al-Suri's network of lethal jihadi cells and the Pentagon's heavily armed and heavily wired soldiers in the global slums. Yet, as Donald Rumsfeld learned so painfully, high technology is not a panacea for the Army's counterinsurgency problems. American forces will most likely never feel at home in the "global cities," an environment where massive firepower will not help them fend off attacks by men who intimately know every alleyway and hiding place. The ability of insurgents and terrorists to confound advanced armies with cheap equipment is also more pronounced in a "global city." Decentralized and networked opponents will continue to employ small arms, shoulder-fired rockets, and improvised explosives to take down highly advanced equipment and armor, although it is likely that guerillas will employ more lethal weapons in future conflicts. As DARPA continues to churn out ever more sophisticated weaponry, guerrillas continue to come up with cost-effective means of fighting back.

Instead of making the military more agile, technology actually holds it back. The military's reliance on motorized vehicles and heavily armed and equipped soldiers hampers mobility and makes soldiers more vulnerable. In contrast, lightly armed insurgents melt into the population and quickly escape their pursuers. There is little reason to suspect that loading a soldier down with more advanced gear will make him the equal of an AK-toting gang leader or guerrilla. It is more likely that the added weight will make him a bigger target.

As the army grows dependent on the use of high technology to compensate for their disadvantages in the "global cities," they will face greater consequences from the inherent difficulties of running logistics in a guerrilla conflict. As Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) scholar Edward N. Luttwack observed in an essay published in *Harper's* magazine, American supply lines in Iraq are consistently in danger of attack from insurgents, militias, and simple highway robbers<sup>26</sup>. This necessitated the use of expensive and heavily armed escorts--as well as helicopter flights--for the most simple and rudimentary of supplies. Facing such a supply problem, it is unlikely that an influx of expensive and difficult-to-replace advanced technology will substantially cut costs or make the military more agile. Cheaply equipped guerrillas, however, face no such handicap---they rely on the black market and stashed arms caches. While the orderly Army logistics system struggles with disorder, insurgents thrive on it.

The deeper problem is not whether rapid-reaction forces are too large or too small to operate in "global cities"--it's political and cultural. Imposing a specifically Western order on environments where rapidly shifting tribal, criminal, ethnic, and

religious alliances constitute primary loyalties is tremendously difficult even in the most favorable of circumstances. It cannot be stressed enough that in many parts of the world the concept of a nation-state itself is a western imposition. Yet these squabbling groups will come together to oppose foreign occupation.

Policymakers and military officials maintain that they've learned their lesson-popular support is necessary. But popular support can't be bought. Building schools and handing out candy is not enough to compensate for the deeper grievance of a hostile foreign occupation, especially if that occupation makes serious moral errors. This does not mean that all future American military interventions are doomed to failure, or that it is impossible for an occupying power to competently conduct counterinsurgent operations. But when the objective is to blast apart a Third World slum city to purge it of terrorists, popular resentment is inevitable. No matter how sleek and how advanced American forces grow, they will always be dependent on massive firepower to "clear" areas and provide support--firepower that always causes collateral damage. And that popular resentment always leads to serious military problems.

The biggest misconception that the Pentagon harbors is the idea that it can determine the battleground. Armies attempting to master the "global cities" or secure access to natural resources are still trying to control fixed assets on a map. Terrorist networks do not have such a spatial limitation—the battlefield is anywhere a lone jihadi can attack, whether it is a café, movie theater, shopping mall, or home. If these attacks are carried out with weapons of mass destruction, the results will be catastrophic. There is little to suggest that Western governments would be prepared to handle the hysteria resulting from such an apocalyptic scenario.

However, the ability of terrorists to employ WMD has long been over-hyped. Despite the ease with which scowling Islamic radicals seem to procure weapons of mass destruction in the movies, real life terrorists have had tremendous difficulty attracting both the scientists and the resources to manufacture and deploy such weaponry. It is not an easy process even for industrialized states, as Iran has discovered. Ikle himself observes that even if such weapons were available, many non-state actors lack the strategic vision and the capacity to capitalize on them. Additionally, decentralized structures may improve the chance of a group's long-term survival but could also prevent it from ever assuming a popular critical mass.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq garnered disproportionate attention for its televised beheadings and bombings, but it does not enjoy mass support from either the Iraqi public or fellow Sunni insurgents. Yet it is illustrative that despite Al Qaeda in Iraq's relative weakness and low-tech operating methods, they managed to spread fear and terror through effective media displays. Even without weapons of mass destruction, terrorists can still use ordinary objects to devastating effect. Bin Laden famously invested only

\$500,000 dollars into paying for 9/11, but his boxcutter-wielding minions inflicted 3,000 casualties, \$500 billion in damages, and changed history<sup>27</sup>.

Terrorist networks do have important vulnerabilities. We do not live in al-Suri's dream world of completely self-sufficient "lone-wolf" terrorists armed with weapons of mass destruction, at least not yet. Even autonomous networks contain experienced people who cannot easily be replaced. As Martin J. Muckian writes in the US Army War College's journal *Parameters*, going after these individuals can cause networks long-term damage. "People or cells with special skills or who act as critical communication links or perform non-redundant functions are key vulnerabilities of a network," Muckian writes<sup>28</sup>. With diligent and cooperative police and intelligence work, these individuals can be rooted out. Terrorist networks are also still dependent on external resources, usually derived from crime and corruption. Muckian advises diplomatic efforts to help other countries improve their governance--doing so will stem the invisible flow of arms, drugs, and fighters across the global network<sup>29</sup>. Yet these steps, if unaccompanied by an ideological offensive, are ultimately just holding measures.

Like al-Suri, we must look back to the stratagems of the Marxist revolutionaries for guidance. The War on Terror bears little physical resemblance to the massive conventional and nuclear face-off of the Cold War, but ideologically there are only superficial differences between terrorist networks and Communist revolutionary groups. Just as Lenin and Mao framed their conflict as a war of the masses against a wealthy elite, Al-Qaeda and their allies have been successful at portraying the last five years as part of a millennial conflict between the oppressed Muslim *umma* and a monolithic American imperium. All revolutionary movements ultimately require a massive, demonic enemy to rally against, and terrorist networks are no exception.

Lacking the traditional hierarchy and military strength of traditional revolutionary movements, terrorist networks derive their very existence from the mythic narrative of the omniscient American "empire"--an empire whose power dominates every aspect of Muslim life. It is tempting to label this narrative a crude caricature, but doing so ignores the fact that it is very real to those on the receiving end of American power, whether running from American (or American-supplied) bombs or witnessing the destruction on al-Jazeera.

Having convinced the Muslim masses that they are powerless victims of American might, Al-Qaeda attempts to motivate them with the **promise of an Islamic utopia**. It remains to be seen whether the promise of religious utopia will be as successful as the narrative of victimization: both the Taliban and Somalia's draconian Islamic Courts Movement lost public support once they came into power; Iran's theocracy maintains itself through coercive force; and the hardline Islamic group Hamas highlighted their anti-Israeli bona fides in their election campaign, not their strict religious ideas. It is also doubtful that religion, especially Al Qaeda's Sunni Islam, will ever overcome the

divisive factors of nationalism, culture, and ethnicity. But, paradoxically, that actually works in Al-Qaeda's favor. Being a movement in struggle is much more preferable than the difficult and unglamorous task of governance.

The important thing is that the **real war is always being fought on an ideological level**. The very idea, linguistically, of conducting a "war" on a concept, such as "Terror," is in fact something derived from Communist theories of class struggle. America must fight the war of ideas by addressing the core political reasons responsible for the rise of Al Qaeda and its affiliates: American support for repressive Arab regimes, most notably the House of Saud; vast economic and political inequalities; American invasions of Muslim land; and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Devoting the utmost political resources to these problems will not defeat terrorist networks--as long as America remains the sole superpower its alliances and interests across the world will provoke lethal resentment. This is the price it must pay for military dominance and its consumption-heavy standard of living, two things Americans are not prepared to give up. Even so, sabotaging the narrative that terrorist networks have constructed will severely weaken them. It is much more preferable to deal with a divided and squabbling group of enemies than a massive united front, especially if that front has the ability to project terror, destruction, and economic devastation across the world.

Of course, fighting an ideological conflict requires the same unity of purpose that al-Suri demands for his networks. American policymakers, the media, and the electorate must come to realize that security will not be gained through force. This will be extremely difficult, given that since World War II Americans have come to equate military power with stability. Despite rhetoric from some American politicians that "isolationism" is on the rise, the disaster in Iraq will not alter this fundamental public perception. Policymakers could find themselves under pressure to soothe public fears by providing "security theater"--displays of overwhelming force that do little to solve the problems. The Bush administration turned "security theater" into an art, with its massive domestic spying programs, color-coded alerts, and pre-emptive war. If terrorists strike again inside American soil, the public will once again look for reassurance in heavily armed soldiers patrolling airports and stealth bombers streaking over Middle Eastern skies. However, politicians must remember that their responsibility as leaders is to cure the disease, not proscribe placebos.

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- <sup>2</sup> Ibd.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibd.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibd.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibd.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibd.
- <sup>7</sup> Andrew Black. "Al-Suri's Adoption of Fourth Generation Warfare Doctrine." *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor.* 21 September 2006.

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### **Book Chapter:**

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