DEVELOPING A STRATEGY TO DEFEAT RADICAL ISLAMISM

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"The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature."[1]

Terrorism is the "calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological."[2] By definition then, terror is a tactical means applied by an adversary to achieve a strategic or operational end – indeed not an end in and of itself.

Recognizing terror as a tactic and not a strategy is a critical nuance both when conducting threat analysis, and when identifying our own most appropriate and effective mix of instruments that can be packaged into a strategy to counter the objectives of those organizations that use it. This recognition is an intellectual first step strategists must take in order to understand how adversaries employ terror in conjunction with other capabilities as a means toward achieving their strategic objectives.

Three subsequent framing questions must then be answered to assist in properly analyzing the nature of the non-state actor threat: "what are his strategic objectives and approach"; "how does he generate material, financial, and popular support for his position"; and "how do his capabilities (operational reach) match his intent". Answering these three questions

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[1] Von Clausewitz, Carl, <u>On War</u>, edited by Howard and Paret, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1976
[2] Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary

will inform decision-makers of the actions that can best be employed in a strategic approach to defeat the threat through a coherent strategy and synchronized supporting operational approaches. Our current strategy fails to do this.

Following the terrorist attacks by Al Q'aeda against the United States that culminated in the destruction of the World Trade Center and damage to the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, the United States recognized the need for a national level strategy to fight terrorism and published its first Strategy for Combating Terror in 2003, with a subsequent revision in 2006. In formulating this strategy, we confused the use of terror as a tactic with terror as an end, and failed to properly identify the enemy in the context of the strategic environment, thus hobbling our efforts to develop a fully coherent and synchronized approach to defeat him.

In his book The Lost Meaning of Strategy, Hew Strachan argues that "the word 'strategy' has acquired a universality which has robbed it of meaning, and left it only with banalities."[3] The same can be said for the word 'terrorism', as it is confused as an enemy strategy rather than the tactic that it is, with the end result being a lukewarm stew of official documents that make intellectual leaps without the basis of proven assumptions, and are compiled without an adequate knowledge of both the enemy and his strategy from which we can then build an informed and synchronized framework of actions necessary to defeat him.

Because terror is but a tactic employed by an enemy, the United States does not need a National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, but rather a strategy for combating the reactionary-traditionalist insurgency[4] of Radical Islamism. This strategy must be nested with clearly defined

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[3] Strachan, Hew, "The Lost Meaning of Strategy", Survival, volume 47 number 3.
[4] O'Neill, Bard E., Insurgency and Terrorism, Potomac Books, Inc., Washington D.C. 2005, p.21

national interests elucidated in the National Security Strategy, and properly identify the threat as Radical Islamism while relegating "terrorism" to its proper place as an asymmetric tactic used by comparatively weak opponents against a stronger adversary.

In support of this argument, I will critique two central elements of our current Strategy to Combat Terrorism: the nature of the enemy, and the assumption that democracy is the long-term solution. In assessing the nature of the enemy, I will look through the lens of the three threat analysis framing questions proposed above. I will then offer an alternative approach that can properly package means in a focused framework to achieve specific ends. The alternative approach will include recommended changes to current supporting diplomatic and informational strategies in order to better focus our resources and strengthen our capability to achieve national objectives.

The current strategy fails to clearly define the enemy. While specifically referencing Al Q'aeda in a number of places and identifying "the principal terrorist enemy… a transnational, movement of extremist organizations – and their state and non-state supporters – which have in common that they exploit Islam and use terrorism for ideological ends"[5], our current strategy attempts to meld a variety of non-state actors that use the tactics of terror into a single enemy, thereby failing to analyze and prioritize disparate organizational objectives based upon their relative goals, intents, and capabilities. The document acknowledges the existence of other organizations as "a host of other groups and individuals (that) also use terror...though their motives and goals may be different…they threaten our interests".[6] In so doing, it applies an

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[5] National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, p.5
[6] Ibid., p.7

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intellectual parity to multiple actors and fails to focus the strategy to defeat the implied true enemy - Radical Islamism.

This melding of multiple organizations that use the tactic of terror into a single enemy solely because of their use of an asymmetric means results in a generalized description of the forty-two distinct terrorist organizations that are currently on the State Department's list of terrorist organizations,[7] but does not identify how each of those organizations threaten our interests, which of those interests that are at risk, and what thei various capabilities and intentions of forty-two groups vis-à-vis our interests are.

Similar to Clausewitz's assertion on the first task of a strategist (see note 1), O'Neill writes that "Understanding the insurgents' goals, techniques, and strategies…enables us to focus our analysis on what exactly governments are responding to…"[8] In order to do this, we must first properly identify and characterize the enemy. Rather than incorrectly identifying terrorism as the adversary and thereby chipping away at the threat along the tactical margins, we must disaggregate the forty-two terrorist organizations and independently analyze them in terms of the three framing questions. This will enable a better and more discrete focus on the goals and capabilities of our main adversary, and the subsequent development of a threat based strategy that attacks their center of gravity along multiple lines.

In attacking the enemy's strategy and building our own, we must certainly defend against terrorism, one of their tactics, however countering their terrorist tactics alone will not be

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[7] Fact Sheet, U.S. State Department (Office of Counterterrorism), "Foreign Terrorist Organizations", Oct 11, 2005
[8] O'Neill, Bard E., Insurgency and Terrorism, Potomac Books, Inc., Washington D.C. 2005, p.155-156. "Understanding the insurgents' goals, techniques, and strategies…enables us to focus our analysis on what exactly governments are responding to…"

decisive. Indeed, if the preponderance of our national efforts are allocated toward fighting terrorism rather than toward packaging means to attack the strategy of a discrete enemy, we risk remaining in a tactical defense and not fully weighting our potentially decisive offensive military, informational, and diplomatic capabilities.

Section 140(d)(2) of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1988 and 1989 defines terrorism as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents."[9] A disaggregated analysis of the forty-two terrorist organizations clearly results in a variety of disparate groups that use terror against differing target sets based upon their raison d'et, have a wide range of political objectives, and a significant variance in term of capabilities and operational reach.

The majority of State Department's designated foreign terrorist organizations are focused on strategic political objectives that are internal to the states in which they operate. While if successful in achieving their goals, most pose an indirect threat to the United States and not a direct threat. Two examples are the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) of Sri Lanka and Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) of Peru. While both organizations pose differing levels of threat to the viability of the states in which they operate, they are internal insurgencies (one extremely weak) that do not present any significant threat to U.S. interests. Despite this fact, our National Strategy for Combating Terrorism does not make this critical distinction between Sendero Luminoso and those organizations that do pose a direct threat to our interests and indeed have both the capability and intent to directly attack our interests.

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[9] U.S. Department of State Fact Sheet, Office of Counterterrorism, Washington, DC October 11, 2005

The top tier of terrorist organizations – those that do pose a direct threat to the United States and possess both the capability and intent to do us harm – are the organizations against which we need to develop a specific and tailored strategy. An analysis of the organizations that fall into this latter category results in a stark realization that is inherently obvious yet problematic to state for fear of alienating great segments of the world population. The reality is that the organizations that threaten the United States have a significant commonality – they are all Islamic.

Recommended informational approaches are addressed later, but some common terminology is necessary at this point. Since 9/11, the U.S. has publicly stated that we are not at war with Islam, yet at the same time the administration has referred to the enemy as Violent Islamic Extremists, Islamic Fundamentalists, Islamic Radicals, and Jihadists. These terms may imply the same thing to a domestic U.S. audience, yet they have significantly different meanings to those of the Muslim faith. "Islamic has to do with the ideals and achievements of the Muslims and the Muslim religion. Thus, we speak of Islamic art. We speak of Islamic ethics. It is a misuse of the word Islamic."[10] Similarly, the term Jihad has two meanings, and within each of those meaning lie various theologically based subsets. The 'Greater Jihad' (sometimes referred to as the Inner Jihad) refers to a Muslim's quest for inner peace, holiness, and union with God. It is the duty of each Muslim to constantly strive for holiness in such a manner, much as in the Judeo-Western tradition one is called to avoid the temptation of sin. The 'Lesser Jihad' on the other hand refers to spreading the Islamic faith, and while not necessarily a call to arms, it oftentimes is. This definitional nuance, while largely lost on a domestic audience, is not lost in

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[10] Cole, Juan, Informed Comment, "Bush, Islamic Facism, and the Christians of Jounieh", August 8, 2006

the Muslim world. The terms we use resonate with a divisive ring that alienates many people and government's with whom we want to strengthen ties.

Islamism, on the other hand, refers to the Lesser Jihad. When linked with radicalism and used in its proper context, Islamism can better define the threat groups we face without unnecessarily alienating large segments of the world's population. "…many Western observers and policy-makers have tended to lump all forms of Islamism together, brand them as radical and treat them as hostile. *However, this monolithic concept is both fundamentally misconceived and misleading in its policy prescriptions*." [11] The enemy is not Islam, not fundamentalism, not internal Jihadists, but is Radical Islamism – the school of thought that advocates lesser Jihad through the use of violence. It is from there, the nexus of radicalism and Islamism, whence Al Q'aeda and others spring.

Our strategy must then identify the enemy as Radical Islamism, and must develop a clear understanding and appreciation of the enemy's strategy in order to defeat it.[12] While our current strategy acknowledges that Al Q'aeda and other Radical Islamic groups have an ideology, we must also acknowledge that the enemy has a *rational* strategy that flows from this ideology, and that their use of terror is but one of a number of means by which they pursue their strategic objectives. Referring to Al Q'aeda and associated Radical Islamic groups, a Rand Corporation study found that they "act in a largely rational manner in the sense that they weigh ends and means, consider alternative approaches, and calculate costs and benefits."[13]

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[11] "Islamism, Violence, and Reform", International Crisis Group, February 2008, URL http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=2969
[12] Tsu, Sun The Art of War, Oxford University Press, London, 1963, p. 77 "Thus, what is of extreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy"
[13] "Beyond Al Q'aeda: The Global Jihadist Movement", RAND Corporation, 2006

As an example, one study identifies 18 separate Radical Islamist clusters around the world, and their varying degrees of association with Al Q'aeda.[14] Referred to as the "Al Q'aeda Nebula", they range geographically, religiously (all varying sects of Sunni Islam), and have converging goals and objectives. They fit into the Radical Islamism operational framework, yet are not analyzed as such. Such a strategic analysis will lead to a better understanding of the enemy strategy and the subsequent policies and strategies that the United States must take to in response to counter it.

It is here, with the starting point of knowing the enemy and specifically answering the question "what are his objectives and strategic approach", that we should apply the first of the three framing questions in order to inform our own strategic thinking and devising a comprehensive strategy to defeat Radical Islamism with a focus on the Al Q'aeda nebula. The application of the known facts and drawn assumptions derived from an analysis of the enemy will enable policy makers and strategists to package various combinations of instruments to deny Radical Islamists their goals through both defensive and offensive actions across the spectrum of military operations and the non-military instruments of statecraft.

The offensive capability does not imply a strictly military application of the elements of power, but also requires significant offensive diplomatic, informational, and economic measures as well – many of which are adequately outlined in the current strategy. Unfortunately, those instruments are outlined only in the framework of four priorities of action to be taken in the short term,[15] and may be characterized as operational objectives rather than long term strategic ends.

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[14] "Beyond Al Q'aeda: The Global Jihadist Movement", RAND Corporation, 2006, Table S1
[15] "National Strategy for Combating Terrorism", p. 11.

The greater weakness, however, is that because we have neither adequately identified the enemy nor conducted the required analysis of his strategic framework, our strategic and operational level approaches may confuse activity for progress.

It is the packaging of the elements of national power against a specific enemy – Radical Islamism – in order to defeat their strategy that must be rebalanced after we more clearly define the enemy and analyze his strategy. A better understanding of the enemy strategy will allow us to build a thoughtful, focused, and sustained effort against Radical Islamism that can rapidly identify their critical capabilities and vulnerabilities, identify fault lines and fissures for exploitation, and anticipate their operational level objectives in order for us to counter them.

One method for accomplishing this analysis that would better inform us of the enemy strategy and develop a more refined counterinsurgency strategy, could be the use of O'Neill's eight step analysis of the insurgent framework.[16] Regardless of the method used, the first step is to identify and analyze the enemy in order to determine the nature of the war upon which we have entered. This analysis must be focused on the true enemy, Radical Islamism, not on 42 terrorist organizations writ large. Then and only then can we develop a coherent strategy that develops ends focused on the proper enemy and the subsequent packaging of means in a reinforcing manner to achieve them.

A serious consideration of our strategy must also revisit the assumption that democracy and democratic governments are the long term solution to defeating the enemy. This is necessary to have a consistent strategy that is coherent and understandable in the court of international public opinion. The long term approach in our National Strategy for Combating

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[16] O'Neill, Chapter 6

Terrorism is to advance effective democracy.[17] This poses a significant dilemma for policymakers and strategist alike, as competing risks and opportunities serve as counterweights to such a broad assumption. *Supporting* all democratic movements implies that we will *counter* all non-democratic governments; a luxury that we can ill-afford due to our dependence on many undemocratic governments for our own stability and security. There are non-democratic governments we may want to support in order to advance larger security and stability interests, and there are democratic nations whose policies we may find detrimental to our interests, preferring instead a non-democratic government sympathetic to and supportive of our needs. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan demonstrate this dilemma, and the strategic challenges we face when rhetoric and realism collide.   While both of these nations are non-democratic and their citizenry includes many Radical Islamists (15 of the 19 hijackers on 9/11 were Saudi citizens), they are also both allies whose support is a critical capability in our fight against Radical Islamism.

Saudi Arabia is a monarchy with an abysmal human rights record. "Overall human rights conditions remain poor in Saudi Arabia, an absolute monarchy", reported Human Rights Watch in 2008.[18] It regularly suspends rule of law, uses its security apparatus to deny basic freedoms such as free speech, and regularly and violently squelches any calls for democratic advances. Saudi Arabia's human rights and governance record are the antithesis of the values espoused in our National Security Strategy and National Strategy for Combating Terrorism.   On the Failed States Index category that measures the application of rule of law and human rights violations (defined as widespread abuse of legal, political and social rights, including those of individuals,

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[17] National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, p.9
[18] "World Report 2007", Human Rights Watch, February 2008 URL: http://hrw.org/wr2k7/

groups or cultural institutions, harassment of the press, politicization of the judiciary, internal use

of military for political ends, public repression of political opponents, religious or cultural

persecution), Saudi Arabia is awarded a ranking of 8.8.[19] With a ranking of 10 being the worst

possible, Saudi Arabia is comfortably nestled between Iran and the Democratic Republic of

Congo.

One might suppose a nation such as this would not be one of the largest recipients of U.S.

foreign military sales, might face various economic sanctions, and be subject to public and

private diplomatic pressure to democratize. Such is not the case, and we continue to support and

closely cooperate with the Saudi government - both as a stabilizing influence in the Middle East

and as the largest exporter of petroleum products to the United States. It is in our interest to do

so, and we take this course to maintain regional stability and our access to energy resources –

both critical requirements for our overall security.   There may be another reason for continued

support to Saudi Arabia, however, and it is illuminated through the framing question that asks

how the enemy generates material, financial, and popular support for his position.

As briefly discussed earlier, the 'Lesser Jihad' refers to spreading the Islamic faith, and

oftentimes is a call to arms. Radical Islamists are, by definition, on a lesser Jihad that is

characterized by violence and the tactical use of terror to achieve strategic ends. As part of this

effort, one of Al Q'aeda's desired strategic ends is the overthrow of the Saudi government and

the establishment of a 'genuinely Muslim state'[20] in the nation that is home to Islam's two holiest

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[19] Failed States Index, "The Fund for Peace", URL
http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=229&Itemid=366
[20] The Origins of al Qaeda's Ideology: Implications for US Strategy, Chritospher Henzel, "Parameters", Spring
2005, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle PA, p.71

sites, Mecca and Medina. Strategically, Saudi Arabia is the 'near enemy', and the western world

the 'far enemy' of Radical Islamism. "Zawahiri identifies and prioritizes the goals of what he

calls the revolutionary fundamentalist movement: first, achievement of ideological coherence

and organization, then struggle against the existing regimes of the Muslim world." [21]

      With this aspect of Radical Islamist strategy accepted, it becomes apparent that

pressuring the Saudi monarchy to relinquish the reigns of power in favor of a more

representative form of government would pose unacceptable risks. The seeds of Al Q'aeda were

sown in Saudi Arabia through the majority Wahabbi sect, and significant portions of the Saudi

population sympathize with Al Q'aeda.   Pushing for democratic changes in Saudi governmental

structures could well result in the undesired consequence of an unfriendly government that not

only controls and provides us with vast portions of our energy needs, but conceivably could

result in a government that is controlled by a strengthened, emboldened, and enriched Radical

Islamist organization with unimagined material and financial resources.

      While democracy is a core value upon which our nation was founded and as a nation we

view it's pursuit as an appropriate goal, it is prudent for us to actively encourage democracy in

other nations only when its pursuit is not outweighed by other vital interests. Democracies in

some nations may result in governments whose policies we cannot tolerate, and the undemocratic

devil we know is a more acceptable alternative. In the illustration of Saudi Arabia,

democratization plays a faint second fiddle to our need for regional stability and economic

security. Our realistic judgment requires that we support the existing and imperfect

undemocratic regime, despite our idealistic policies.

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[21] Ibid., p74

Pakistan serves as an example through which we can ask how the enemy's capabilities and operational reach match his intent. This South Asian nation is an important ally in U.S. efforts to both degrade the capabilities of Al Q'aeda and deny them sanctuary in North Waziristan, yet it is only since its elections in February that it is recognized as a nominal democracy. Until then, it was controlled by General Musharraf (who remains President, although the constitutional legality of his holding that position is in question), who in 1999 led a coup against a democratically elected government. Not only did we encourage the leadership of this undemocratic nation to cooperate with us, but we also actively and publicly supported the Musharraf regime through multiple visits by senior government officials, public statements of support, the suspension of existing sanctions related to their nuclear weapons program, and continued large military and economic aid packages.

This position was taken because Al Qaeda needs the freedom of maneuver afforded by the ungoverned spaces of Waziristan and Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas. It provides them with an unmatched capability to organize, train fighters, and move with relative impunity across the border into Afghanistan. Denying them this critical capability will degrade their operational reach, and lessen the threat they pose to the United States. Realizing this, we determined that our security interests were best served by providing unprecedented assistance to Pakistan in order to ensure that Al Q'aeda's intent and capabilities were asymmetrical. If the newly elected Sharif regime and his coalition government do not support U.S. efforts to capture and kill Al Q'aeda in Pakistan, it remains to be seen how our desired end-states will be pursued and current policies revisited.

These are but two examples of the strategic exigencies that, in the interest of our security and fight against Radical Islamism, require practical alliances with and support to non-democratic nations. Indeed, pursuing democratic reforms in these nations could have the consequence of governments that do not ally with us in the War on Terror. This poses a significant challenge to the U.S., primarily because our strategic documents, diplomatic initiatives, and supporting Public Diplomacy efforts are not consistent with our actions. Indeed, the apparent conflict between our idealistic policies and our realistic actions results in a schizophrenic execution that exposes our flanks to legitimate criticism from the world community.

The recent election of Hamas as the leading political party in the Palestinian Authority and our encouraging the cancellation of elections in Algeria for fear of a Salafist government are additional examples of democratic ideals working against our interests. As a corollary, Iran – properly identified in our strategy as a state sponsor of terrorism, is in fact one of only four "conditional democracies" in the Middle East (the other three being Israel, Turkey, and Lebanon).[22]

The clear dichotomy between our long term goal of democracy and those practical alliances that are incongruent with it yet necessary in the fight against Radical Islamism calls into question the legitimacy of our strategy and complicates our ability to effectively disseminate our national message through diplomatic and informational initiatives. Our realistic acknowledgment that we must form alliances and work closely with non-democratic regimes belies our idealist strategy, and can be exploited informationally.

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[22] Gerner, Deborah J. Understanding the Contemporary Middle East, "Middle Eastern Politics", 2000, p. 117

The perception of the United States by other nations is largely negative, and has decreased consistently over the past five years.[23] While there is no proven causal relationship between our "War on Terror" initiatives and the precipitous decline in our legitimacy as viewed by the international community, there is certainly a correlation between the execution of our strategy and the world's perception of our actions that cannot be ignored and is worth further analysis. Without international support for our policies, we will continue to lose good will and cooperation with other nations at best, and create further enemies in its worst manifestation. In either case the result is a degraded capability to generate multi-lateral solutions to the challenges we face, and in both cases conditions that may contribute to the underlying conditions that breed Radical Islamism. This can only be remedied through a comprehensive rewrite of our strategy.

The short term priorities in the current strategy, while important, are all generically framed toward "terrorism" without being specifically targeted against Radical Islamism. For example, the first priority of "Prevent Attack by Terrorist Networks" identifies three subsets: prevent attacks, deny terrorists entry to the U.S., and defend potential targets.[24] To further deconstruct this, the first subset, "prevent attacks", provides only a superficial overview of target sets: leaders, soldiers, resources (weapons and funds), and propaganda outlets. These are all critical capabilities that any organization – to include Radical Islamist organizations - must posses in order to effectively operate. A better approach would be to identify the critical capabilities *and vulnerabilities* that specific Radical Islamist organizations need to operate. While this can only be accomplished through an analysis of the enemy, it requires exactly that

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[23] Pew Research Group, June 2006, slides 69 and 70 "The Strategic Context" (ppt).
[24] National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, p. 11-13.

analysis to properly identify the enemy for our analytical resources to be focused on the proper enemy and his vulnerabilities. The "big hand, little map" short term priorities are too all encompassing, and while they may fit any generic target set, they may hit wide of the mark against the organizations that pose the largest threat to the U.S.

To remedy this, we must develop a strategy against Radical Islamism, analyze his strategy, and frame the analysis through the lens of the three framing questions posed. This will better inform us as to nature of the threat, at which point we can more effectively package means to achieve our ends.

The long term approach of advancing effective democracy requires a re-evaluation in terms of its potential risks and consequences to related vital interests (e.g. energy), the apparent inconsistency of our policy and its effect on our legitimacy, and indeed weather or not liberal democracies in the Middle East are truly in our best interests as a nation. It is entirely possible that democracies in the Middle East may take a form that poses an even greater threat to our national interests than the trans-national threats we face today, and it is clear that democracies are not free of terrorists or insurgencies (e.g. Great Britain and the IRA, Colombia and the FARC, Peru and Sendero Luminoso, and in the recent past Italy and the Red Brigade, as well as Germany and the Bader-Meinhoff Gang).

An alternative approach must include greater resources allocated to working with other nations to reduce ungoverned spaces through extending the reach and vertical penetration of central governments into remote areas, and better provision of services to the population – regardless of their form of government. This will attack the enemy's critical capabilities, degrade their operational reach, and diminish their levels of popular support.

Our strategy should be one of unapologetic realism targeted at the greatest threats, not the marginal ones. The strategy must leave room for democratic initiatives and increasing transparency, accountability, and popular representation in other nations, however these ought to be viewed as possible supporting efforts where and when appropriate to achieve the main effort – defeating Radical Islamism. A realistic approach is not synonymous with hard power, and a successful strategy will likely require much greater resources allocated to the non-military instruments than is currently apportioned.

Until we properly identify the enemy vice the tactic, we will not adequately analyze and counter their strategy in a comprehensive and supportable manner. On our current course, we will continue to have successes against the tactics of terror, but we will only win when we understand and fight the strategy of the most dangerous organizations that use the terror tactic to achieve strategic aims.