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A REVISED STRATEGY FOR THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM

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ABSTRACT

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Should the United States revise its national strategy in order to win the Global War on Terrorism? The war on terror has been accurately characterized as a battle of arms and a battle of ideas. But the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism offers priorities of action that are kinetic, one dimensional, and have a low probability of winning in the long term. The enemy draws its strength from an ideology that crosses political, religious and socioeconomic boundaries with unifying themes of hatred, resentment and willingness to change the staus quo at any cost. A more complete strategy is needed to counter this ideology. New priorities of action include information operations, strategic communications and strengthening socieites. These actions will help undermine the enemy's ability to transfer feelings of oppression and hopelessness into hatred and violence. With a balanced strategy, in the long run we will win both the battle of arms and ideas.

A REVISED STRATEGY FOR THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM

Should the United States revise its national strategy in order to win the Global War on Terrorism? This same question was posed in a slightly different way in a 2003 memo released by former Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld which stated, "Are we capturing, killing, or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassas and radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us?"[1] With the United States entering its sixth year in the Global War on Terror, this is a vital question that merits serious consideration. Since September 11, 2001, thousands of Americans have lost their lives and the United States has spent over $400 billion on the war. To ensure our enormous investment of blood and treasure have not been made in vain, we must examine our current strategy and make adjustments as needed.

To take the first step, we should consider some advice from a classic military theorist. Carl von Clausewitz said, "The supreme, the most far reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish 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."[2] So in order to build an effective strategy for the Global War on Terrorism, one has to first understand the nature of the conflict. Although it may seem simplistic, the title of the conflict is misleading. The war on terrorism has a political label, but it is not accurate. To label the current conflict as a war on terrorism is like describing World War II as a war on submarines. Focusing on the enemy's tactics does not achieve strategic results. Defining the current conflict is not just semantics. Words have meaning and using the wrong words can have serious consequences. It is important to first properly define the conflict in order to gain an understanding of how to achieve our objectives.

David Kilcullen, chief strategist in the State Department's office of counterterrorism, defines the war on terror as a "global counterinsurgency." According to Kilcullen, a terrorist is just "a kook in a room and beyond persuasion; an insurgent has a mass base whose support can be won or lost through politics."[3] Lieutenant General (retired) Wallace Gregson agrees. General Gregson, former Commander, Marine Corps Forces Pacific, describes the threat as "an insurgency, a popular movement that seeks to change the status quo through violence, subversion, propaganda, terrorism or other military action. It is ideologically driven, fundamentalist and extremist."[4]

The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism accurately characterizes the war on terror as a battle of arms and a battle of ideas. To win the war, the strategy offers four short term

priorities of action: 1) Prevent attacks by terrorist networks by capturing and killing foot soldiers, intercepting funds and disrupting communications. 2) Deny weapons of mass destruction to rogue states and terrorist allies who seek to use them by encouraging the nonproliferation of such weapons and detering their employment. 3) Deny terrorists the support and sanctuary of rogue states by isolating regimes that serve as state sponsors for the violent extremists, maintaining sanctions against those regimes, and holding them accountable if they assist terrorists. 4) Deny terrorists control of any nation they would use as a base and launching pad for terror by denying physical, legal, cyber, and financial safehavens for extremists.[5] These actions are certainly necessary, but they are kinetic solutions and defensive in nature. Also, they are predicated on our ability to successfully diminish the enemy's capabilities in the long term.

The national strategy offers only one long term approach in the war on terror – advancing democracy. The strategy proposes that effective democracy offers an ownership stake in society, eases grievances that can be blamed on others, discredits a subculture of conspiracy and misinformation, and offers respect for human dignity.[6] But according to Dr. Joseph Nye, "Democracy will not convert the crop of extremist jihadis to peaceful change, and too rapid a transition may destabilize governments and enhance the extremists' opportunities to wreak havoc."[7] Elisabeth Kvitashvili draws a similar conclusion with a model that links violence and terror to regime type in an inverted U-shaped curve, sometimes called "the democracy curve."[8] In highly authoritarian states, there is little violent extremism. Similarly, there is little violence or terror in well established democracies. But when institutions begin to shift between authoritarianism and democracy, the risk of violent extremism increases dramatically. Fundamental political change creates a new distribution of power, opens channels for competition, and draws in new threats and actors. The result is a fluid environment where extremists have an opportunity to apply violence to promote their agenda or operate with impunity while the government is trying to stabilize. A prime example is the conditions in Iraq.

Based on the short and long term priorities of action, our current national strategy is one dimensional and has a low probability of success in the long term. Democracy is not a panacea solution for all societies. And capturing or killing existing insurgents, limiting their destructive capacity, and minimizing their bases of operations may help win the battle of arms, but does nothing to win the battle of ideas. Mr. Rumsfeld seemed to agree. As if to answer his own question on how effective the United States has been in deterring and dissuading extremists, in a March 2006 statement Mr. Rumsfeld said, "If I were grading I would say we probably deserve

a 'D' or a 'D-plus' as a country as to how well we're doing in the battle of ideas that's taking place in the world today."[9]

In order to raise our grade and improve our strategy, a new approach is needed. In developing a strategy, we need to match our priorities of action to the true nature of the conflict. The first step is to examine the enemy in order to gain a better understanding of their base of power and how they draw their strengths. Based on that information, we should asses their requirements and vulnerabilities. In other words we should identify the enemy's center of gravity, then apply the right resources and methods to attack those areas.

Sun Tzu advised "Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril."[10] So who is the enemy and what do they want? The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism identifies the enemy as "a transnational movement of extremist organizations, networks and individuals – and their state and non-state supporters – which have in common that they exploit Islam and use terrorism for ideological ends."[11] Although this description includes several organizations, the national strategy goes on to explain that al Qaeda is the most dangerous manifestation of the enemy. Al Qaeda is considered so dangerous because of its global ambition and willingness to directly confront the United States with violent attacks. It has emerged as a network of operations experts, financiers and propagandists. According to General Gregson, they are very dangerous because they "think globally and act locally."[12]

According to its leader Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda's goal is to, "create an empire of all the world's one billion Muslims, ruled by a single leader…and establish a government which follows the rule of the Caliphs (spiritual leader of Islam)."[13] Determined to use religion as a source of legitimacy, bin Laden issued a fatwa in 1998 calling for violence against the United States. A fatwa is a religious declaration made by an Islamic scholar whose extensive training enables him to carefully interpret Koranic verses then issue judgments on Islamic law. In the declaration, bin Laden stated, "The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies -- civilians and military -- is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible."[14] The allegations in the fatwa were that the United States desecrated Islam through a "brutal crusade occupation" of the Arabian Peninsula (the holiest of places), humiliated Muslim people and weakened Arab states to guarantee Israel's survival. These emotionally charged issues of disrespect for Islam, humiliation of Muslim people and support for Israel were carefully chosen by bin Laden to draw popular support among Arabs and disenfranchised Muslims both within and outside the Middle East. In the years following bin Laden's declaration of war against America, al Qaeda pursued its violent agenda by bombing the U.S. embassies in Kenya and

Nairobi and the USS Cole while it was docked in Yemen. Even before the devastating attacks in New York and Washington D.C. on September 11 2001, George Tenet, Director of the CIA, testified to the Senate Intelligence Committee that "Osama bin Laden and his global network of lieutenants and associates remain the most immediate threat."[15]

How can al Qaeda – a non-state actor with no standing army and no traditional instruments of power – serve as the most significant threat to the most powerful nation on Earth? The answer lies in the ideas the organization espouses to leverage support for and influence disenfranchised members of different societies to engage in transnational asymmetric warfare. This ideology is the true root cause of the global war on terror and serves as the most critical center of gravity for al Qaeda. This power base of ideas crosses political, religious, and socio-economic boundaries, but the unifying themes are resentment, hatred and eagerness to change the status quo at any cost.

Across the political dimension, a good deal of animosity in Muslim countries stems from America's policy toward Israel. There is no question that the United States is a strong supporter of Israel. Since 1976, the U.S. provided Israel more military and economic support than any other country.[16] Israel receives $3 billion in direct assistance each year, the opportunity to buy state-of-the-art weapons like Blackhawk helicopters and F-16 fighter jets, and access to intelligence the U.S. denies to its NATO allies. Based on this high level of support, the overwhelming assessment in the Muslim and Arab world is that the United Sates policy always favors Israel. The perception is America provides unwavering support to Israel and either controls or sanctions its military actions.[17] This perception results in feeling of resentment based on Palestinian victimization and fuels an "us versus them" mentality. Further, from the Palestinian and Arab standpoint, U.S. policy is hypocritical requiring Arabs to do one thing and allowing the Israelis to do another. Prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003, an Egyptian woman was asked whether Saddam Hussein posed a threat in the Middle East with chemical weapons. She responded that, "Israel has chemical weapons as well, and the United States does not attack Israel for that."[18] Further, after Israel's assassination of two Hamas leaders in 2004, the U.S. released statements that Israel had the right to defend itself against terror. America's support for Israel's actions resulted in anger and frustration in the Muslim world especially in light of U.S. policy which forbids assassination (as outlined in Presidential Executive Order 12333). And during the 2006 conflict between Israel and Lebanon, the Bush administration rejected calls for an immediate cease fire giving the perception that the U.S. encouraged Israel to perpetuate the violence.

In addition to political discontent, insurgents exploit the religion of Islam and twist its meaning in order to justify their actions. In bin Laden's 1998 fatwa, he quotes the Koran and states, "in the words of Almighty God: 'And why should ye not fight in the cause of God and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed)?'". The themes of oppression and religious persecution strike emotional chords with Muslims. From the Muslim perspective the origin of religious conflict has a long history dating back to the twelfth century when the European crusaders invaded the Middle East. This was a very violent period in which the European Christians killed thousands of Muslim "unbelievers" in order to "punish them for their blasphemies." The siege of Jerusalem is just one example of the brutality of the crusades. According to a historian, William of Tyre, the crusaders tried to kill all Muslims and Jews in the Holy City with "such a deluge of bloodshed that the victors themselves could not help but be struck with horror and disgust."[19] Such massacres during the crusades made the Christians infamous to Islam.

Another religious tie in bin Laden's fatwa is the call to arms through jihad: "the jihad is an individual duty if the enemy destroys the Muslim countries…Nothing is more sacred than belief except repulsing an enemy who is attacking religion and life…We – with God's help – call on every Muslim who believes in God to comply with God's order to kill Americans and launch the raid on Satan's U.S. troops and the devil's supporters allying with them". Obviously the intent was to rally Muslims in a holy war but bin Laden's use of the term jihad was technically incorrect. The word jihad has a multifaceted meaning. Some believe it means striving in the way of God, or the struggle within each Muslim to overcome his own failings and sins.[20] Another meaning of jihad is in the sense of fighting, but Muslim scholars agree that several conditions must be met to be religiously sanctioned. There must be a just cause for the conflict, it must be declared by the right authority and the fighting must be waged in accordance with Islamic ethical principles, including sparing the lives of women, children and the elderly.[21] In direct contrast, bin Laden uses his own justification and his own authority to declare war on Americans (including civilians) and its allies.

The insurgents also twist religion to suit their own purpose when recruiting and training. In some cases recruits are drawn from extremist religious seminaries, or madrasas, where students are indoctrinated at an early age about the importance of donating their lives in a holy war. In other instances, recruits are drawn from militant mosques. Dr Jerrold M. Post, an expert on political psychology and terrorism, documented the path followed by a young man in Zanzibar, Tanzania in becoming an al Qaeda operative.[22] The first step on that path occurred at the local mosque. Attendees at the mosque were told about the suffering of Muslims in Bosnia

and Chechnya, and they were shown videos of the women and children killed by the Serbian and Russian militaries. The sermons focused on the message that they all belonged to a community of Muslims who had an obligation to help Muslim victims. Before long the young man was inspired to become (in his own words), "a soldier for Allah." He was sent to an al Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan where he received military training in the mornings, and he learned al Qaeda's version of Islam in the afternoons. After 9 or 10 months of training, he was sent back to Zanzibar and was told to wait for a call to arms. Three years later he was contacted by a member of al Qaeda and to "do a jihad job." He accepted without question and participated in the bombing of the U.S. embassy in Tanzania.

Al Qaeda uses its own interpretation of the Koran to justify acts strictly forbidden by Islam – murder of innocent victims and attacking members of the Abrahamic faith. This is illustrated in the Al Qaeda Training Manual.[23] In the first section of the manual there is a prayer to Allah and a pledge against the "oppressors" and "human dogs" to "make their women widows and their children orphans…to make them desire death…to slaughter them like lambs and let the Nile, al-Asi and Euphrates rivers flow with their blood." Later in that section is the Koranic verse: "O ye who believe! Fear Allah as he should be feared, and die not except in a state of Islam." The radical Islamists use this command to inspire suicidal terrorism. Based on the alleged link to the Koran, insurgents espouse the virtues of being a martyr with the promise of entry to paradise and that their family name will be held in honor. But an American scholar who edited the training manual, Dr. Post, explained the proper context of the Koranic verse. Based on the information in supporting passages, the Koran describes the rewards in the afterlife given to a man who led a good life, and that only God can give and take away life. It is certainly not the message the insurgents claim. In the same chapter of the training manual is another Koranic verse: "Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into the hearts of the enemies of Allah and your enemies." The insurgents use this as justification for acts of terrorism, and the phrase was used by bin Laden in statements he issued after the events of September 11. But Dr. Post explains the passage is not a license to kill indiscriminately but a general admonition concerning preparing for all battles. A common theme throughout the manual is edit Koranic verses to undermine their true meaning. Verses are edited to exclude mentioning the "People of the Book" (Jews and Christians) and God's view of them. Interestingly, the Koran designates special status to monotheistic religions by stating: "Those who believe (Muslims), the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabeans – whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and do good deeds, they shall

have their reward from their Lord, shall have nothing to fear, nor shall they come to grief." But the al Qaeda manual denies any legitimacy to this group and excludes any mention of them.

The final element of the insurgents' ideology exploits socioeconomic conditions. Conditions such as poverty, lack of education, high unemployment and denial to basic human services serve as a breeding ground for conflict. During a United Nations Conference on poverty in March 2002, President Bush said that the United States was ready to challenge, "the poverty and hopelessness and lack of education and failed governments that too often allow conditions that terrorists can seize and try to turn to their advantage."[24] Rapid population growth in underdeveloped countries has created a demographic explosion of young males. In these same countries educational opportunities are extremely limited and unemployment rates are very high. The resulting conditions are described by Edward Newman as, "Poverty of resources, combined with poverty of prospects, choices and respect."[25] Poor societies often equate to poor or weak governance. Citizens are denied basic human services like security, clean water and sanitation. These governments also often lack legitimacy and citizens are blocked from significant representation. Inside these weak states, there is a vacuum of authority creating "black holes within which fanaticism can emerge".[26] These areas make ideal locations for insurgent organizations, like al Qaeda, to establish a base of operations. The insurgents prey on the disenfranchised youth to recruit new members. Insurgent leaders seek people who feel humiliated, threatened, aggrieved and without help. They fan the flames of hate to create what Jessica Stern describes as a "burning sense of injustice" and an "uncontrollable rage".[27] As an example, in a study of 250 people in a militant violent extremist group, more than half expressed feelings of humiliation, indignity, dispossession and trauma.[28]

The insurgent ideology is violence is the only method to transform repression and humiliation into empowerment. Borum describes a four phase model to describe how extremists recruit members and justify violence.[29] In the first stage, insurgent leaders point out, "It's Not Right." This is based on social and economic deprivation and is the starting point for a sense of injustice. The next phase is, "It's Not Fair" where inequality leads to resentment. The third phase, "It's Your Fault" is blame attribution. This idea is based on a "just world hypothesis" where people believe they live in a world where they get what they deserve, unless they are victims of injustice in which case someone else is at fault. This leads to the final phase, "You're Evil" which in their minds places the insurgents on the side of God and erodes the barriers to violence in order to kill indiscriminately.

Based on the above information, the nature of the conflict is clear. The war on terror is a global counterinsurgency best characterized as a battle of arms and a battle of ideas. The

kinetic short term priorities of action described in the National Strategy for Combating Terror should be continued to win the battle of arms. But the battle of ideas cannot be won using the military as the primary instrument of national power. The enemy is exploiting political, religious and socioeconomic conditions to transform feelings of victimization, resentment and hate into violence. So how should we revise our national strategy to achieve our long term objectives?

William M. Darley proposes a model that offers keen insight.[30] Darley draws a continuum between kinetic operations and information operations. On one extreme is total war or pure violence where information operations play a minimal role. On the other extreme is pure politics which is devoid of violence and information operations is the sole action. At some point along the continuum, a demarcation occurs where either kinetic operations or information operations become the supported activity. Darley's thesis is policymakers and military operators must understand the nature of the conflict and apply the right instruments of power in order to achieve their political objectives. In a war of ideas, information operations become the supported activity. Kinetic action is still critical in order to deny attack of the homeland and destroy insurgents' capability, but in order to diminish the enemy's long term capabilities and weaken their ideology, information operations become critical. Or as Clausewitz wisely stated, "The moral elements are the most important in war…the physical seem little more than the wooden hilt, while the moral factors are the precious metal, the real weapon, the finely honed blade."[31]

In order to improve our national strategy and achieve long term political objectives, we should consider the strategic guidance offered by a general officer who spoke to the U.S. Army War College.32 According to the general, to defeat al Qaeda we must explain our strategy, expose the enemy, and amplify moderate voices in the Muslim world.   More specifically, the U.S. should carefully consider the impact of foreign policy in the Middle East. Clear and public statements about America's relationship with Israel and our long term interests in the region require open communications. Modification or resolution may be needed, but the answer is not appeasement. According to Killcullen, "winning hearts and minds is not a matter of making people *like* you…but getting them to accept that supporting your side is in their best interest."[33] The first step is to recognize that our policy with Israel is viewed as one-sided or hypocritical and work to counter that perception.   The U.S. should try to create balance – or the perception of balance – on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. But even if the issue is resolved, this will not end violent extremism.[34] America's relationship with Israel is a compelling recruiting tool for insurgent leaders but it is only a subset of more important issues. It is imperative to attack al Qaeda's ideology and lessen the group's appeal to gain greater results.

In order to undermine one of the insurgents' most powerful tactics – exploitation of religion – the U.S. should place special emphasis on key influencers such as clerics and imams whose views have a ripple effect through societies.[35] These leaders should be encouraged to denounce violent extremism and disassociate the movement from Islam. Specifically, religious leaders should 1) Discredit the claim that insurgents speak for Islam and expose the false ties to religion in extremist propaganda. 2) Proclaim the insurgents have no moral or religious authority to attack women, children and the elderly, kill other Muslims or declare certain Muslims apostates.   3) Discredit proclamations by leaders like bin Laden in an effort to weaken extremist recruiting efforts. Clerics and imams should also be encouraged to foster tolerance and mutual respect among their followers. The U.S. should encourage religious leaders to seek opportunities to participate in symbolic events that resonate with local populations. Additionally, the American government should highlight statements by influential Salafi clerics in Saudi Arabia denouncing jihadi terrorism. Finally, the U.S. should also underscore mainstream Muslims voices in the media to foster respect for religious diversity. In the words of Mr. Rumsfeld, "Muslims…are going to have to take back their religion and must not allow people to pervert it the way al Qaeda leadership is perverting it."[36]

Developments in Saudi Arabia provide positive examples of how a Muslim country can fight extremism.[37] The Saudis have begun to crack the network of religious extremists that gave al Qaeda a platform. The Saudi Interior Ministry now oversees an "ideological reeducation program" supervised by religious scholars and university professors. More than 400 people have been released through the program. In addition, the House of Saud announced a new council to oversee the transition to the next generation of leadership. The plan appears to provide a stable legal framework for selecting a successor to the king and crown prince. This provides transparency in selection of national leaders and may ease the danger of a future political crisis. Finally, Saudi security forces have taken a more aggressive stance to eradicate insurgents in their country. The Saudis have foiled 25 major terrorist attacks; they captured or killed 264 al Qaeda operatives and arrested 845 people with ties to al Qaeda; and of the 26 terrorists on the Saudi most wanted list, all but one have been captured or killed. The Saudi's success is based on a government focusing on national solutions such as religious and political reforms.

If information operations are truly the supported activity in the current conflict, the United States should improve its strategic communications. The U.S. should counter the messages presented by al Qaeda and extremist groups. Hoffman believes America should help foreign governments and civil society groups flood the internet with anti-jihadist messages.[38] These

messages do not necessarily have to be replaced with pro-America ones, but the key is to give an alternative perspective. Also, America's humanitarian relief efforts should be highlighted. The U.S. spends considerable funds on the developing world without much attention. According to an official at the U.S. Global AIDS program in Africa, "We're spending billions of dollars on AIDS – an effort that could generate considerable gratitude in African countries with substantial Muslim populations…but no one in Africa has a clue."[39] Additionally, the totalitarian government that al Qaeda wants to establish should be exposed. The only state deemed legitimate by the insurgents was the Taliban where books were burned, music was banned, cultural icons were destroyed, girls were denied education, and women were forbidden to work even if their husbands had been killed. The majority of civilized people do not want to live in a society the extremists seek.

Strengthening societies is another important way to undermine insurgents' power and appeal in at-risk regions. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has significant expertise in development assistance. This expertise should be leveraged to support police training programs in order to enhance local security. Improve governments' ability to provide civil services such as agriculture development, medical treatment and access to clean water. Expand efforts to fund programs that offer education, job training, employment and political participation to young people. The intent is to counter the insurgents' message of humiliation hopelessness with feelings of dignity and self-worth that come with working in and contributing to society. The U.S. should also help establish competing trusted networks (e.g. friendly mosques, professional societies, labor unions). According to Killcullen, "The key is providing a social context for individuals to choose ways other than jihad."[40]

The positive results of helping societies can be seen in Indonesia.[41] The tsunami that hit in December 2004 left Indonesia with 131,000 dead and 450,000 people homeless. The U.S. immediately responded with disaster relief. These efforts built substantial goodwill and eroded support for Jamaah Islamiah (JI), an insurgent organization in the region. According to the leader of JI, as a result of the U.S. military relief effort, he was losing the battle for the hearts and minds of the people. As an added benefit, polls taken in Indonesia subsequent to the relief effort showed the popularity of al Qaeda dropped 20 percent and the positive perception of the U.S. rose over 30 percent.

In conclusion, the U.S. should revise its strategy in order to win the Global War on Terrorism. The war we are fighting is a global counterinsurgency against transnational extremists who are ideologically driven. We are engaged in both a battle of arms and a battle of ideas. But unfortunately our current strategy only adequately outlines a plan of action for the

battle of arms. Our focus is almost exclusively on kinetic operations designed to capture or kill insurgents, minimize their bases of operations, or limit their destructive capability. A more balanced approach is needed to win the battle of ideas. In order to defeat al Qaeda, we must understand their ideology. Their goal is to transfer feelings of oppression, humiliation and hopelessness into hatred and violence. They highlight emotionally charged issues such as the United States' relationship with Israel to draw in supporters. They twist the religion of Islam to justify murdering innocent civilians and declare Muslims that oppose them as apostates. And they prey on members of poor societies with weak governance to recruit new members. This ideology is what fuels their cause and it is where the enemy draws its strength. We must expand our national strategy to counter this ideology. One key area is the application of information operations. The U.S. should encourage Islamic leaders to denounce violent extremism and disassociate the movement from Islam. America should help other governments and civil society groups flood the internet with anti-jihadist messages. Strategic communications should be improved to highlight the humanitarian and relief efforts conducted by the U.S. and expose the totalitarian regime that al Qaeda wants to establish. USAID should expand its efforts to strengthen governments in at-risk areas to improve security, civil services and employment opportunities. By undermining the enemy's ability to exploit political and socioeconomic conditions as well as discrediting their false interpretations of Islam, the U.S. can minimize the insurgents' ability to transfer feelings of oppression and hopelessness into hatred and violence. If we apply a balanced strategy, in the long run we will win both the battle of arms and the battle of ideas.

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