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**Lessons of Post Cold War Conflict:
Middle Eastern Lessons
and Perspectives**

**Working Paper for the NIC Global Trends 2020 Project
on the Changing Nature of Warfare**

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Executive Summary

The United States is so focused on the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan that it sometimes forgets that these two conflicts do not necessarily dominate how either regional military forces or the various extremists hostile to the US and the West perceive the lessons of recent conflict. There is an equal tendency to forget the past and the influence of the military experience of regional wars and the experiences of other countries such as Israel. Far too often, the “Post Cold War” era is perceived as a US-centric *revolution* in military affairs when it is actually a much broader-based *evolution* in military affairs.

This scarcely means, however, that the Afghan and Iraq Wars are not providing lessons to America’s current and potential enemies. Such lessons include:

- 1) Lessons learned by hostile states affecting their regular military or “conventional forces.”** The Middle East and North Africa is a region of some 22-24 countries, almost all of which have some mix of serious internal security problems, ongoing conflicts and/or serious external threats. They all pay close attention to wars in their region, as well as to military developments in the US and the level of US success and failure in the Gulf War, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The Arab-Israeli conflict is another major force shaping regional perceptions, and Arab forces and Iran pay close attention to both how Israel fights and shapes its forces and how it uses US weapons and technology.

With the exception of Egypt, Israel, and Jordan, however, the ability to study such lessons is rarely the ability to act upon them with any great effectiveness. There is a considerable debate over the reasons why most regional countries are slow to react and make effective use of new technology and tactics. There is no debate over the fact that changes in tactics and technology are rarely balanced or efficient, and the end result is typically erratic and unpredictable.

Middle Eastern states face steadily growing pressures on their military budgets because of limited economic development, population growth, and a youth explosion that demands services and jobs. While it is not readily apparent, the total military spending of Middle Eastern and North Africa states dropped from \$96.3 billion in 1985 to \$60.5 billion in current US dollars in 2001 and \$57.9 billion in 2002. During this same period, total active military personnel dropped from 3.3 million to 2.4 million. Some countries – such as Egypt, Israel, and the UAE – have the aid or wealth to continue to recapitalize their present force structure. In broad terms, however, spending on arms imports has changed radically and few countries can afford to make radical increases in their investments in advanced weapons and technology except in the face of the most urgent threat.

The states most likely to be hostile to the US suffer from a number of serious problems in force modernization that other MENA countries do not. They have lost the Soviet Union as a source of technology and cheap or free arms. They

have often been subject to sanctions or political limits to their purchases of arms, they have mismanaged their economies and have limited resources, and they have often been slow adopters of new tactics and technology. At the same time, they have maintained far larger force structures than they can afford to maintain, modernize, train, and sustain. The following data on arms transfers illustrate this point, and it is striking that two traditional threats – Iraq and Libya – are no longer hostile in the past sense of the term.

The remaining threat countries – Iran and Syria – differ sharply in their response to these realities. It is clear that Iran has done a better job of learning from the recent US, British, and Israeli experience. Its military literature focuses much more clearly on the lessons to be learned from such experience, and includes Russian and Chinese analysis as well as Western analysis. Iran clearly understands its vulnerability to the kind of attack the US led in Iraq and Afghanistan and that it cannot compete at the conventional level.

The end result is that Iran has selectively purchased systems tailored more to asymmetric warfare than direct conventional conflict, slowly modernized its armor, and bought limited “fixes” of items like electronics, precision guided and advanced weapons, and RPVs. It has also increased its passive defense measures like shelters, concealment, and dispersal. These are all steps Iran began as early as the third year of the Iran-Iraq War, however, and the lessons of recent wars seem to have largely changed the focus of such efforts rather than their character.

Syria’s military modernization has faced much more severe financial pressures than Iran’s – partly because Syria is only a minor oil exporter and partly because of its unpaid debt for past arms to the FSU. The Syrian armed forces also seem more rigid and less adaptive than those of Iran, and more focused on traditional areas of force improvement like tanks and anti-armored weapons, more advanced surface-to-air missiles, and maintaining force size and mass.

- 2) Lessons learned by hostile states or movements regarding asymmetric warfare.** The most important single lesson that both hostile and non-hostile Middle Eastern states have learned from the US performance in Afghanistan and Iraq – and from the overall pattern of US involvement in Post Cold War conflict - is to avoid conventional conflict with the US.

This, however, is a lesson that pre dates the end of the Cold War. Iran had every reason to learn from its “tanker war” with the US and Britain in 1987-1988, and every country had reason to learn from the Gulf War. Arguably, it is also a lesson every regional state had reason to learn about US capabilities for war by watching Israel’s performance in 1967, 1973, and 1982. In addition, the lessons of “precision,” “speed,” synchronicity,” “maneuvering” and all of the other buzzwords of the revolution in military affairs, may be reinforced by advances in IS&R capabilities, jointness, and netcentric warfare. However, they are scarcely new.

Even before the Cold War was over, both hostile states and movements learned to detect US and Western vulnerabilities to asymmetric warfare and studied them long before the Afghan conflict. These vulnerabilities include: sudden or surprise attack; saturation and the use of mass to create a defensive or deterrent morass; casualties; inflicting casualties and collateral damage; low-intensity combat; hostage taking and terrorism; urban and built-up area warfare; extended conflict and occupation warfare. They also include exploiting the threat or actual use of weapons of mass destruction; proxy warfare and false flags; HUMINT, area expertise, and language skills; and political, ideological, and psychological warfare. While most of the aforementioned vulnerabilities are not new, Post Cold War struggles like the Afghan and Iraq conflicts have made hostile and potentially hostile states focus even more seriously on such vulnerabilities.

- 3) Lessons learned by Islamist extremist and other hostile movements.** A key lesson hostile movements have learned is to mutate, disperse, and fragment. The current debate over whether Al Qaida still exercises central control or has “franchised” other movements using its name is largely irrelevant. It has done both in the past and it is almost certainly doing so now. Moreover, Al Qaida and its affiliates are such a clear and present danger that it is easy to forget that Salafi and other violent Islamist movements exist and they too will mutate and evolve long after the present cells and organizations are broken up.

Islamist extremist and other hostile movements have learned from Post Cold War conflicts there are many cases where they have simply adapted old tactics to fighting with the US and its allies. Furthermore, such movements have often learned more from their experience in exploiting US weaknesses than from the lessons imposed by US strengths.

There are numerous case examples of political, psychological, and information warfare lessons that Islamist extremist and other hostile movements. These include: co-opt the middle and create links to more moderate and popular causes; use Arab satellite television as well as traditional media; maintain a strategy of attrition but strike hard according to a calendar of turning points and/or at targets with high political, social, and economic impact; and push “hot buttons.”

They also include limited actions that provoke disproportionate fear and “terror” force the US and its allies into costly, drastic, and sometimes provocative responses; use Americans as proxies; attack UN, NGO, Embassies, and Aid and foreign business operations; “Horror” attacks, atrocities, and alienation: keep “failed states” failed; confuse the identity of the attacker; exploit conspiracy theories; and to shelter in Mosques, Shrines, high value targets, and targets with high cultural impact; exploit, exaggerate, and falsify US attacks that cause civilian casualties and collateral damage, friendly fire against local allies, and incidents where the US can be blamed for being anti-Arab and anti-Islam

- 4) Lessons learned regarding proliferation.** Ever since the Gulf War, it has been clear that local powers and movements perceive weapons of mass destruction as a potential counter to US conventional capabilities and a way of striking decisively at the US. This “lesson,” however, needs to be kept in perspective. The race to

acquire weapons of mass destruction in the region dates back to the 1950s. It has been constantly kept to the fore by Israel's undeclared deterrent, and was reinforced both by Iraq's behavior during the Iran-Iraq War, and UNSCOM's discoveries after the Gulf War.

The fact that Al Qaida was found to have conducted extensive studies of how to acquire weapons of mass destruction in Afghanistan is an important warning; so too are their efforts to attack Jordan in March 2004 with chemical weapons, the Ricin discoveries in the UK, and the knowledge that designs for reasonably sophisticated devices are available from commercial publishers and on the internet. The threat of terrorists using such weapons in attacks is clearly present and growing. Hostile movements are also aware that the US ability to track the source of covert attacks is limited. The failure to find the culprit responsible for the Anthrax attacks on the Capital makes this all too clear.

In short, the US has taught the region both military lessons by its superior tactical performance in the conventional warfare, and a far less advantageous set of lessons in regard to its capabilities for other forms of conflict. It has shown that it does not fully understand the extent to which it is involved in a broad political, psychological, and ideology conflict in the region. It has shown that it is inept in political, psychological, and information warfare, and self-deluding and ethnocentric in evaluating its own performance. It has shown that its advantages in defeating conventional forces do not extend to dispersed asymmetric warfare, and that it is currently vulnerable to strategic overstretch in trying to carry out "Phase IV" and stability operations in even one major contingency.

The US cannot ignore regional opponents -- whether states or movements -- who learn from current conflicts, and then attempt to "mirror image" its military strengths. They can still kill, and sometimes quite effectively. Such regional opponents, however, cannot win. The US, however, really does need to worry about opponents who learn from the whole mix of regional conflicts -- including political and ideological struggles -- and then attempt to exploit America's very real combination of political and military weaknesses.

US military victories in political, ideological, and psychological conflicts can only be tactical at best. Unless the US comes to understand that it is fighting a region-wide political, ideological, and psychological conflict, and adapts to fight this struggle on a continuing and much more realistic basis, it risks winning military engagements and losing the real battle. Unless the US makes stability and nation building a goal and course of action from the first day of planning through combat to a true peace, its so-called revolution in military affairs will be a tactical triumph and a grand strategic failure.

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The Sources of Military and Strategic Lessons in the Middle East

The US is so focused on the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan that it sometimes forgets that these two conflicts do not necessarily dominate how either regional military forces or the various extremists hostile to the US and the West perceive the lessons of recent conflict. There is an equal tendency to forget the past history of the region, the influence of the military experience of regional wars, and the extent regional powers, Islamist extremists, and insurgents learn from their experiences with other countries such as Israel. Far too often, the “Post Cold War” era is perceived as a US-centric *revolution* in military affairs when it is actually a much broader-based *evolution* in military affairs.

This scarcely means that the Afghan and Iraq Wars are not providing lessons to America’s current and potential enemies, but they must be kept in the following perspective:

- **There is a broader war on terrorism:** The US, most Arab and Islamic states, and Israel are all fighting some form of struggle against Islamist extremists, and the Palestinian Authority has its own struggle with Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The Afghan and Iraq conflicts are just one set of lessons in such warfare.

It is also far from clear that the US is winning this broader war on terrorism. While Al Qaida’s initial leadership cadre has taken serious losses since September

11, 2001, a recent IISS estimate indicates that its strength may actually have grown to some 18,000 men in various affiliates throughout the world because of the political and military conflicts in the region. Other estimates indicate that some 70,000-100,000 men have been trained in various camps in Afghanistan, the Philippines, and elsewhere in the Muslim world in recent decades, and religious schools throughout the Middle East still train young men in Islamist extremist beliefs. The growing anger over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the US and British role in Iraq, have served as another source of new cadres of terrorists, Islamist extremists, and insurgents.

The situation in Afghanistan and Iraq is still fluid, whereas Pakistan remains a question mark. Regional government have done far better, and have generally brought Islamic extremists under control, or have defeated them, but there still is fighting at some level in Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, extremist cells or movements still exist -- many growing in strength -- in virtually every Arab or Islamist country.

For those in the region, this is a struggle about ideology and ideas, not about who wins battles: It is a cliché to point out that the US won most of its battles in Vietnam, but lost the struggle at the political, psychological, and ideological level. That does not make the point any less valid. For many Islamist extremists, defeat at the tactical or even organizational level is far less important than winning what they perceive as political, psychological, and symbolic victories. This not only helps explain their actions in Afghanistan and Iraq, but throughout the Islamic world and in the West.

- **The war on terrorism is coupled to a much broader political, social, economic, and ideological struggle within the Arab and Islamic worlds**

Far more is involved than Islamist extremism. The greater Middle East is being driven by a lack of global economic competitiveness, slow rates of growth in per capita income, rapid population growth, and a virtual “youth explosion” in a region where unemployment is already critically high.

Failed secularism is a problem at the ideological and political level. Secular regimes are often repressive and ineffective, and do not meet social and economic challenges. Traditional political parties and ideologies like Pan Arabism, Arab socialism, Marxism, and free market capitalism have failed at the popular level and many turn back to Islam and social custom.

The resulting “clash within a civilization” can lead to either evolution or revolution, and inevitably interacts with Islamist extremism. These forces create an ongoing and much broader-based political, psychological, and ideological struggle for influence throughout the Middle East.

So far, the US has shown little skill in dealing with this ideological struggle. American public diplomacy is weak, underfunded and undermanned, and often highly ethnocentric US policy is faltering and there often is far too little useful substance to “sell.” US attempts at political, psychological, and information warfare often do far more to build false confidence than defeat Islamist extremists, or influence perceptions in the region.

- **The Arab and Islamic perception that the US is a cobelligerent with Israel in its struggle against the Palestinians makes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict another critical war.** At one level, Americans should bear in mind that the Iranian and Arab militaries continually study the IDF, and its use of tactics and technology, and have done so for decades. The US is scarcely the only modern “Western” force shaping the lessons regional states and militant movements learn from warfare.

At another level, the fact that regional politics and media identify the US so closely with the actions of Israel is a far greater factor in shaping the overall pattern of regional hostility to the US than the relatively small minority that supports Islamist extremist ideologies. Long before the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, regional media tied the US to their selective and almost uniformly hostile coverage of Israel and Israel’s military actions against the Palestinians. Since the invasion of Iraq, the images of the two “occupiers” and their military actions are often coupled together or portrayed sequentially.

Public opinion polls throughout the region have repeatedly shown that this coupling of the US to Israel at the political and military level is by far the greatest single reason for popular anger or hostility to the US, steadily fueled by biased news coverage by both print media and satellite television.

While US efforts to conduct political, psychological, and information warfare suffer from low quality, irrelevance, and inadequate resources at every level; Islamist extremists, and hostile states and political movements, have steadily learned how to exploit the linkage between the US and Israel to undercut US efforts and defeat them at the ideological level.

This has been steadily compounded in recent years by a US inability to address the problems in the Arab-Israeli peace process with any effectiveness, and the failure of both some US policymakers and some in the US military to understand that so-called “Phase IV” operations were by far the most critical single aspect of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and that this battle was fundamentally political and ideological, and not one that could be won in military terms.

The US needs to understand that the “Israeli-Palestinian conflict” is a serious strategic liability, and it is likely to remain one for the next decade -- almost regardless of Israeli actions. While it is possible to criticize Israel for its approach to the peace process and some of its tactics, the fact remains that Israel faces very

real threats that cannot be dealt with simply by calling for peace. Moreover, even success in resuming an effective peace process, or even in reaching a full peace settlement, will still occur in a political climate where the US will still be the target of substantial Arab and Islamic popular hostility for an extended period. Peace can probably be won, but not quickly and decisively, not without lingering terrorism and violence, and not in ways that prevent the current struggle from undercutting the US position in the region for years to come.

- **Proliferation in Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, and India provides lessons to Iran and the Arab states of the Middle East on how to proliferate:** Like it or not, the success of other proliferating states outside the Middle East provides powerful counters to the US and British invasion of Iraq. Their “lesson” is that if a nation conceals, lies, and appears to comply, it will have the time to establish nuclear and other WMD capabilities. Iraq may be a warning about being too overt, but it is scarcely the only lesson that most regional proliferators – Iran and Syria –react to.
- **History does exist:** Americans need to remember that many of the patterns of military development in the region were established in the 1950s and 1960s, and many of the patterns in terrorism in the 1960s and 1970s. The US has occasionally introduced important changes in tactics and technology, but there is also considerable historical continuity

The Key Lessons that Come Out of Post Cold War Conflicts

All of these points take on a special importance in the light of how America’s current and potential opponents view the Gulf War, Afghan conflict, and Iraq War. The cumulative military lesson of all these conflicts is to avoid fighting the US and its allies on their own terms, and in direct “conventional “ conflicts.

There are two important corollaries to these lessons:

- First, current and potential opponents must avoid the development, deployment, and use of weapons of mass destruction in ways that can be targeted. They must seek to avoid overt military forces where US preemption, deterrence, defense, and retaliation, can be an effective and politically justifiable response.
- Second, both regional hostile states and hostile movements understand that no amount of effort to adopt US tactics, weapons and technology, training methods, and readiness standards can significantly limit US capabilities to defeat conventional military forces and concentrated guerrilla forces in the foreseeable future. Traditional methods of modernization and force improvement can do nothing to significantly reduce the probability of defeat.

At the same time, the US has taught the region a far less advantageous set of lessons in regard to its capabilities for other forms of conflict. It has shown that it does not fully

understand the extent to which it is involved in a broad political, psychological, and ideology conflict in the region. It has shown that it is incompetent and inept in political, psychological, and information warfare, and self-deluding and ethnocentric in evaluating its own performance. It has shown that its advantages in defeating conventional forces do not extend to dispersed asymmetric warfare, and that it is currently vulnerable to strategic overstretch in trying to carry out "Phase IV" and stability operations in even one major contingency.

The US cannot ignore regional opponents -- whether states or movements -- who learn from current conflicts, and then attempt to "mirror image" its military strengths. They can still kill, and sometimes quite effectively. Such regional opponents, however, cannot win. However, the US needs to worry far more about opponents who learn from the whole mix of regional conflicts -- including political and ideological struggles -- and then attempt to exploit America's very real combination of political and military weaknesses.

It is the political and ideological type of threat, and not the current tactical battles against organized insurgents, Islamists, or hostile factions, that is the critical challenge today in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is also the threat that will play out over at least 5-10 years in both countries, even if pluralistic and modern regimes do eventually emerge. If the US does not understand this reality, and act upon it accordingly, political and ideological forces will ensure that insurgents and instability will endure long after an active US military presence has ended.

More generally, hostile states and movements have learned more than enough to make political, ideological and asymmetric warfare an enduring threat. It is clear from the actions of Al Qaida, the Taliban fighters, and Iraqi insurgents that regional fighters and terrorist movements are flexible and adaptive enough so that the threats posed by terrorist, extremist, and other hostile movements are certain to mutate and evolve for at least several decades.

US military victories in political, ideological, and psychological conflicts can only be tactical at best. Unless the US comes to understand that it is fighting a region-wide political, ideological, and psychological conflict, and adapts to fight this struggle on a continuing and much more realistic basis, it risks winning military engagements and losing the real battle. Unless the US makes stability and nation building a goal and course of action from the first day of planning, then throughout the course of combat, and from the "stabilization" phase to a true peace, its so-called revolution in military affairs will be a tactical triumph and a grand strategic failure.

The Detailed Lessons of Current Conflicts

Any effort to speculate on the lessons of recent wars that will shape the behavior of Middle Eastern states, Islamic extremists, and hostile movements through 2020 is necessarily speculative. There are some 22-26 countries in the Middle East, depending on who is defining the region. They are all very different, and several will probably

experience major political upheavals, and or learn form new wars of their own in the coming years.

The current obsession with Al Qaida disguises the fact Islam and Islamist extremism is splintered and composed of many different and constantly changing elements whose behavior is often highly localized and shaped by the political and military situation in a given country. Other movements may emerge as hostile to the US because of the Israeli-Palestinian and Iraq conflicts, hard-line Iranian hostility and the broadly based anger in the Arab world.

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At the same time, it is possible to describe on some of the more lessons that hostile states and movements seem to have learned from recent and ongoing conflicts, particularly the Afghan and Iraq wars. Such lessons can be divided into four main groups:

- Lessons learned by hostile states affecting their regular military or “conventional forces;”
- Lessons learned by hostile states or movements regarding asymmetric warfare;
- Lessons learned by Islamist extremist and other hostile movements; and
- Lessons learned regarding proliferation.

Hostile States and “Conventional Forces”

Like other regions of the world, Middle Eastern military forces are in rapid transition. The Middle East and North Africa is a region of some 22-24 countries, almost all of which have some mix of serious internal security problems, ongoing conflicts and/or serious external threats. They all pay close attention to wars in their region, and particularly to both military developments in the US and the level of US success and failure in the Gulf War, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The Arab-Israeli conflict is also a major force shaping regional perceptions, and Arab forces and Iran pay close attention to both how Israel fights and shapes its forces and how it uses US weapons and technology.

Anyone who has visited Arab and Iranian military facilities knows that they have extensive libraries of US military publications, as well as Western and Israeli military literature. They make use of US and Western arms suppliers and technical services, and a considerable amount of material is translated or provided in English in Arab and Iranian military publications. At least in friendly countries, this includes material on force transformation, the revolution in military affairs, asymmetric warfare, netcentric warfare, and counterterrorism, and a significant number of officers provide the experience they learned training in the US. Both Iran and Syria have military publications that regularly excerpt such US and Western material.

With the exception of Egypt, Israel, and Jordan, however, the ability to study such lessons is rarely the ability to act upon them with any great effectiveness. There is a

considerable debate over the reasons why most regional countries are slow to react and make effective use of new technology and tactics. There is no debate over the fact that changes in tactics and technology are rarely balanced or efficient, and the end result is typically erratic and unpredictable.

Factors Driving the Pace of Regional Military Modernization

Moreover, as is the case in much of the world, the changes taking place in regional conventional forces are driven by many factors that have little to do with the lessons of post-Cold War conflict that relate to the US.

- Many countries have been fighting a war on terrorism and against Islamist extremism far longer than the US. They have developed their own approaches to such conflicts, and are inherently better equipped than the US to deal with the political, psychological, and information aspects of such threats, as well as better able to make use of human intelligence and internal security methods.
- Proliferation is a long-standing problem that has scarcely been solved by Iraq's defeat and Libya's roll-back of its efforts. While proliferation is partly a counter to US conventional military strength, the quiet arms race between Israel and Syria (and Egypt to some degree) dates back to the 1950s, and long before the US played a high profile military role in the region. Iran's efforts began when the main threat was the Soviet Union and that were revitalized by the Iran-Iraq War. Iran sees the US as a threat, but also focuses on Israel. Indian and Pakistan proliferation have also acted to stimulate change in the region.
- Nations react to their own wars. Morocco is fighting the Polisario, which many Moroccan military officers see as a proxy for Algeria. Algeria has long been involved in its own civil war. Libya confronts a low-level insurgent threat in the Green Mountain area. Egypt is still dealing with the threat posed by the AIG and other radical elements. Israel is fighting the Palestinians and is a central focus of Egyptian, Jordanian, Lebanese, and Syrian military planning. The Gulf states have only begun to adapt to the fall of Saddam Hussein, and focus on the potential threat from Iran and the ongoing threat of Islamist extremism. Yemen still has serious internal stability problems, and the Sudan has a seemingly endless aptitude for civil conflict.
- Middle Eastern states face steadily growing pressures on their military budgets because of limited economic development, population growth, and a youth explosion that demands services and jobs. While it is not readily apparent, the total military spending of Middle Eastern and North Africa states dropped from \$96.3 billion in 1985 to \$60.5 billion in current US dollars in 2001 and \$57.9 billion in 2002. During this same period, total active military personnel dropped from 3.3 million to 2.4 million. Some countries – such as Egypt, Israel, and the UAE – have the aid or wealth to continue to recapitalize their present force structure. In broad terms, however, spending on arms imports has changed

radically and few countries can afford to make radical increases in their investments in advanced weapons and technology except in the face of the most urgent threat.

Period (\$US Current Billions)	<u>1987-1990</u>	<u>1991-1994</u>	<u>1995-1998</u>	<u>1999-2002</u>
Arms Deliveries	79.4	47.1	30.8	35.7
New Arms Orders	93.3	58.7	63.9	46.6

Source: Richard F. Grimmett.

- These resource problems are further compounded by the fact that many countries now have long backlogs of deliveries – most dating back to the aftermath of the first Gulf War -- and are already experiencing serious conversion and absorption problems, compounded by maintenance, sustainability, and training problems. This does not mean countries cannot change. In fact, the MENA region placed \$13.1 billion worth of new orders for arms imports during 1995-1998 and \$27.0 billion during 1999-2002. This, however, does mean that there are growing limits to what most countries can do.
- The states most likely to be hostile to the US suffer from a number of serious problems in force modernization that other MENA countries do not. They have lost the Soviet Union as a source of technology and cheap or free arms. They have often been subject to sanctions or political limits to their purchases of arms, they have mismanaged their economies and have limited resources, and they have often been slow adopters of new tactics and technology. At the same time, they have maintained far larger force structures than they can afford to maintain, modernize, train, and sustain. The following data on arms transfers illustrate this point, and it is striking that two traditional threats – Iraq and Libya – are no longer hostile in the past sense of the term.

Period (\$US Current Billions)	<u>1987-1990</u>	<u>1991-1994</u>	<u>1995-1998</u>	<u>1999-2002</u>
<u>Iran</u>				
Arms Deliveries	7,800	3,900	2,100	700
New Arms Orders	10,200	2,700	1,700	1,000
<u>Iraq</u>				
Arms Deliveries	16,500	*	*	*
New Arms Orders	10,500	*	*	200
<u>Libya</u>				
Arms Deliveries	2,900	500	100	300
New Arms Orders	3,500	200	200	800
<u>Syria</u>				
Arms Deliveries	5,200	1,400	400	400
New Arms Orders	5,600	900	500	300

Note: * = less than \$50 million.

Source: Richard F. Grimmett.

In any case, one needs to be careful about assuming that nations act in predictable and well structured ways, act on the basis of military lessons, or act in ways that lead to predictable scenarios and forms of war fighting. Conflict and escalation are rarely deliberate in ways that are predictable in peacetime or carried out by “rational bargainers” in a mutually transparent environment. In the real world, events tend to be far more random and chaotic than strategic analysts would like to believe.

The Iranian Case Study

The remaining threat countries – Iran and Syria – differ sharply in their response to these realities. It is clear that Iran has done a better job of learning from the recent US, British, and Israeli experience. Its military literature focuses much more clearly on the lessons to be learned from such experience, and includes Russian and Chinese analysis as well as Western analysis. Iran clearly understands its vulnerability to the kind of attack the US led in Iraq and Afghanistan and that it cannot compete at the conventional level.

At the same time, Iran so far has not been able to react to many of the lessons it learned during the Iran-Iraq War, much less later conflicts. It sought advanced surface-to-air missile defenses like the S-300 as early as the late 1980s. It also tried to modernize its air fleet, sought more advanced armor, and to upgrade and replace its ships in ways it could not afford and/or could not obtain the arms it wanted. It has tried to compensate by developing its own production capabilities, but these have severe limits. While Iran seems to have developed several modernization plans since the Iran-Iraq War, and to have at least discussed major deals with Russia and other potential suppliers, it so far has been unable to offset the overall aging and deterioration of its conventional forces--much less react effectively to the lessons provided by the Iraq and Afghan conflicts.

The end result is that Iran has selectively purchased systems tailored more to asymmetric warfare than direct conventional conflict, slowly modernized its armor, and bought limited “fixes” of items like electronics, precision guided and advanced weapons, and RPVs. It has also increased its passive defense measures like shelters, concealment, and dispersal. These are all steps Iran began as early as the third year of the Iran-Iraq War, however, and the lessons of recent wars seem to have largely changed the focus of such efforts rather than their character.

The Syrian Case Study

Syria’s military modernization has faced much more severe financial pressures than Iran’s – partly because Syria is only a minor oil exporter and partly because of its unpaid debt for past arms to the FSU. The Syrian armed forces also seem more rigid and less adaptive than those of Iran, and more focused on traditional areas of force improvement like tanks and anti-armored weapons, more advanced surface-to-air missiles, and maintaining force size and mass.

Like Iran, Syria has bought limited “fixes” of items like electronics, precision guided and advanced weapons, and RPVs. Syria has attempted to upgrade its T-72 tank force, and

create better mechanized infantry. It has attempted to work around the inherent limits of its aging mix of radars, SAMs, and C⁴I facilities with some better radars and “black box” fixes. It has obtained some of the most modern FSU anti-tank guided weapons.

Once again, however, it is unclear from recent Syrian actions that Syria is doing more than simply modifying lessons it learned about conventional force improvements that it learned during its limited participation in the Gulf War and by watching Israel. Syria has focused thereby on allowing its overall force structure to deteriorate more so than has Iran on tank buys, advanced ATGMs, and light to medium weight surface-to-air missiles. It seems to have become more static, defensive, and mass-oriented at a time Israel should have taught it all it needed to know about the need for a more modern approach to warfare without any Syrian attention to the US. Even Syria’s elite Republican Guard, Special Forces, and attack helicopter units seem to reflect a relatively slow rate of adaptation of new tactics, weapons, and technology.

Other Arab “Wild Cards”

Any regional analysis of the risks posed by the lessons of the Iraq War should note that several countries friendly to the US have done a much better job of improving some aspects of their conventional forces than Iran and Syria, and so could pose a much more serious threat if they ever become hostile. Egypt and Jordan are case in point. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have also paid close attention to the lessons of the conflict, and still have significant discretionary resources to make major arms buys.

Hostile States and Asymmetric Warfare

It seems likely that the most important single lesson that both hostile and non-hostile Middle Eastern states have learned from the US performance in Afghanistan and Iraq – and the overall pattern of US involvement in Post Cold War conflict -- is to avoid conventional conflict with the US. Once again, however, this is a lesson Iran had every reason to learn from its “tanker war” with the US and Britain in 1987-1988, and every country had reason to learn from the Gulf War. Arguably, it is also a lesson every regional state had reason to learn about US capabilities for war by watching Israel’s performance in 1967, 1973, and 1982.

Reinforcing the Lessons of the Past

Each new conflict reinforces the lessons taught regarding the importance of a major qualitative edge in technology, tactics, training, readiness, and sustainability. The lessons of “precision,” “speed,” synchronicity,” “maneuvering” and all of the other buzzwords of the revolution in military affairs, may be reinforced by advances in IS&R capabilities, jointness, and netcentric warfare. However, they are scarcely new.

The response of hostile states is evolutionary. Syria, for example, has used Lebanon as a proxy for war with Israel since 1970. It has used various Palestinian extremist and terrorist movements as proxies for at least as long. Iran has been using Lebanon as a proxy since the early 1980s, and first made major use of a revolutionary movement

against a state at the time of the Shah – when the Shah used the Kurds against Iraq with US backing.

Finding alternatives to direct military confrontation with the US has a long history. At least part of the Iranian effort to build-up a major capability for asymmetric warfare in the Gulf is a product of the “tanker war,” although the Iran-Iraq War did at least as much to drive Iran to build-up the naval branch of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, strengthen its capability to operate off islands near the main shipping channels, acquire mines and anti-ship missiles, and buy submarines. Similarly both Iran and Syria found that transfers of money and weapons to Shi’ite movements in Lebanon could be effective counters to the US presence there after 1982, and ways of forcing a costly proxy war on Israel that still threatens Israel’s northern front.

Both countries have a long experience with “wars of intimidation” in which saber rattling or quiet threats are used to achieve objectives in dealing with their neighbors without active conflict. Iran has used such techniques off and on, and with some skill, against its Southern Gulf neighbors under two totally different types of regimes since the British withdrawal from East of the Suez. Syria quietly pressured Saudi Arabia for aid using such methods from the 1960s onwards. The game board and the color and shape of the pieces may change, but not the essence of the game.

Similarly, there is nothing new about the effort to acquire long-range missiles and weapons of mass destruction as possible counters to superior conventional strength and US and Israeli possession of nuclear weapons. The Shah attempted this as a counter to the Soviet Union in the 1970s, and Khomeini revitalized a program directed against Iraq, Israel, and the US in the 1980s. Syria has sought weapons of mass destruction since the 1960s, and its missile forces date back to the late 1960s.

Post-Cold War Military Vulnerabilities

Many current US and Western vulnerabilities to asymmetric warfare emerged before the Cold War was over, and were being discussed in the Middle East long before the Afghan Conflict. These vulnerabilities may be summarized as:

- **Sudden or surprise attack:** Power projection is dependent on strategic warning, timely decision making, and effective mobilization and redeployment for much of its military effectiveness.
- **Saturation and the use of mass to create a defensive or deterrent morass:** There is no precise way to determine the point at which mass, or force quantity, overcomes superior effectiveness, or force quality — historically, efforts to emphasize mass have been far less successful than military experts predicted at the time. Even the best force, however, reaches the point where it cannot maintain its “edge” in C⁴I/battle management, air combat, or maneuver warfare in the face of superior numbers or multiple threats. Further, saturation may produce a sudden catalytic collapse of effectiveness, rather than a gradual degeneration from which the Israeli Defense Force could recover. This affects forward deployment,

reliance on mobilization and reliance on defensive land tactics versus preemption and “offensive defense.”

- **Taking casualties:** War fighting is not measured simply in terms of whether a given side can win a battle or conflict, but how well it can absorb the damage inflicted upon it. Many powers are highly sensitive to casualties and losses. This sensitivity may limit its operational flexibility in taking risks, and in sustaining some kinds of combat if casualties become serious relative to the apparent value of the immediate objective.
- **Inflicting casualties and collateral damage:** Dependence on world opinion and outside support means some nations increasingly must plan to fight at least low and mid-intensity conflicts in ways that limit enemy casualties and collateral damage to its opponents.
- **Low-intensity and infantry/insurgent dominated combat:** Low-intensity conflict makes it much harder to utilize most technical advantages in combat — because low-intensity wars are largely fought against people, not things. Low-intensity wars are also highly political. The battle for public opinion is as much a condition of victory as killing the enemy. The outcome of such a battle will be highly dependent on the specific political conditions under which it is fought, rather than RMA-like capabilities.
- **Hostage taking and terrorism:** Like low-intensity warfare, hostage-taking and terrorism present the problem that advanced technology powers cannot exploit their conventional strengths, and must fight a low-level battle primarily on the basis of infantry combat. HUMINT is more important than conventional military intelligence, and much of the fight against terrorism may take place in urban or heavily populated areas.
- **Urban and Built-Up Area Warfare:** Advanced military powers are still challenged by the problems of urban warfare. In spite of the performance of US forces in the Iraq War, cases like Fallujah and Sadr’s urban operations have shown that truly pacifying a hostile city or built-up area can be extremely difficult. It also is not clear what would happen if a more popular regime -- such as the government of Iran -- tried to create an urban redoubt. Moreover, most western forces are not trained or equipped to deal with sustained urban warfare in populated areas during regional combat — particularly when the fighting may affect large civilian populations on friendly soil.
- **Extended conflict and occupation warfare:** Not all wars can be quickly terminated, and many forms of warfare — particularly those involving peacekeeping and peace-enforcement — require prolonged military occupations. The result imposes major strains on the US politically, economically, and militarily.
- **Weapons of mass destruction:** The threat or actual use of such weapons can compensate for conventional weakness in some cases and deter military action in others.

- **Proxy warfare and false flags:** As the Lockerbie case demonstrated, states can successfully carry out major acts of terrorism through proxies without having their identity quickly established or suffering major military retaliation. Al Khobar is a more recent case where Iran's full role still remains uncertain and no retaliation has occurred. Similarly, the various charges that Iraq was the source of the first World Trade Center attack, and the conspiracy theories that follow, indicate that false flag operations are feasible. So do the number of terrorist incidents where unknown groups or multiple groups have claimed responsibility, but the true cause has never been firmly established.
- **HUMINT, area expertise, and language skills:** US and Western capabilities to conduct operations requiring extensive area knowledge and language skills are inherently limited. Similarly, high technology IS&R assets have not proved to be a substitute for HUMINT sources and analytic skills, although they can often aid HUMINT at both the operational and analytic level.
- **Attack rear areas and lines of communication:** The US talks about "swarm theory" and discontinuous battlefields, but Iraqi regular and irregular forces quickly learned—as Iraqi insurgents did later—that US rear area, support, and logistic forces are far more vulnerable than US combat elements. Such "swarming" may be slow, if irregular forces are not in place, but potential opponents understand this and can fight discontinuous battles of their own.
- **Political, ideological, and psychological warfare:** As has been discussed earlier, the US is vulnerable to such attacks on the grounds of ethnicity, religion, its status as a superpower active in the region, and its ties to Israel. Ironically, some can exploit its ties to moderate and conservative regimes on the grounds it fails to support reform, while others can exploit its efforts to advance secular political and economic reforms on the grounds they are anti-Islamic.

While most of the vulnerabilities on this list are not new, Post Cold War struggles like the Afghan and Iraq conflicts have made hostile and potentially hostile states focus more seriously on such vulnerabilities. In fact, they have made them the only options that offer some hope of deterrence and victory, particularly if they can be used in ways that do not lead the US to attack with large scale military forces.

It is important to note that it is extremely difficult for states to exploit any mix of such vulnerabilities successfully *in actual military combat* if the US has a serious strategic stake in a conflict. Some of these vulnerabilities do reduce US ability to use military power quickly and decisively against some targets. Some increase the intensity of conflict and the cost in dollars and casualties to the US.

At the same time, they do not provide any hostile or potentially hostile state with a clear way of defeating the US *if* the US determines that stakes are worth escalating to decisive military action. No Middle Eastern state is now strong enough to exploit such "lessons" successfully in major conflict.

Moreover, such efforts can sharply increase the cost of combat to regimes that use them, as well as to the US, and greatly increase the risk the US will escalate to removing the regime involved -- if this is not part of the original war plan.

This may not, however, mean that the states will necessarily avoid force. It can rather an incentive to support violent extremist groups and use them as proxies, to carry out covert attacks, and/or to attempt false flag operations.

Islamist Extremist and Other Hostile Movements

Hostile movements face fewer problems in exploiting such vulnerabilities than states. The Afghan and Iraq conflict have already shown they can hide and disperse, and are willing to take serious losses to achieve an ideological or political goal. The course of the Iraq and Afghan conflict, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and a host of terrorist incidents have all shown how difficult it is to deter and defeat true ideologues, those who are willing to be “martyrs,” and those who believe their cause is predetermined to win and will survive even if they and their movement are destroyed.

More narrowly focused non-state actors may also emerge as a rising threat to the US. The most immediate examples are movements like the Hezbollah, PIJ, and Hamas, because of US ties to Israel. The US also can also become the target of operations by more secular groups – as was the case with hard-line Palestinian groups in the 1960s and 1970s.

Winning by Losing

In fact, one of the most important aspects of Post Cold War conflict in the Middle East is not what Islamist and other extremist movements have learned from the US, or what new tactics they have adopted, but rather the change in their character from relatively clearly defined pragmatic political goals, and an emphasis on survival, to behavior based on eschatological warfare.

As a result, even the most successful US strikes and tactical victories can often be turned into reasons for calling the US an enemy, getting media coverage hostile to the US, and recruiting new cadres. At risk of a terrible pun, post-cold War conflicts and terrorism have shown that the US is culturally vulnerable to eschatological warfare, and has serious trouble in countering extremist ability to climb the “eschatological ladder.”

Mutate, Disperse, and Fragment

Hostile movements have learned they can survive and even enhance their capabilities if they mutate, disperse, and fragment. The current debate over whether Al Qaida still exercises central control, or has “franchised.” other movements using its name is largely irrelevant. It has done both in the past and it is almost certainly doing so now. Moreover, Salafi and other violent Islamist movements have shown they can mutate and evolve long after their initial cells and organizations are broken up.

Tactical Lessons

Hostile non-state actors, like hostile states, learn from a full range of sources and not just from the US. It is clear that regional Islamist extremist and insurgent movements constantly study the history of past terrorist/asymmetric warfare/unconventional warfare attacks, and have long memories. They remember a long menu of options, and often try to repeat past successes. The movement also learned long ago to only keep repeating

successful tactics until they fail, to then use surprise where possible, and to take innovative risks. One does not have to be a Middle East or modern guerilla warfare expert to understand that analysts who insist that terrorist and insurgent movements cannot rapidly change their tactics, or are unwilling to use drastic forms of surprise, are part of the problem and not the solution. One only has to read Sun Tzu.

As a result, when it comes down to the tactical lessons that Islamist extremist and other hostile movements have learned from Post Cold War conflicts, there are many cases where they have really just adapted old tactics in fighting with the US and its allies.

The US often misinterprets the end result, simply because Americans do not have the same collective memory as states and movements in the region. Hostile actors can draw on a long historical menu of past tactics and their results, and adapt them to specific tactical circumstances. The US often ignores both the existence of this menu and the adaptiveness of its opponents, and the end result is often surprise where no surprise should take place.

Political, Psychological, and Information Warfare Lessons

There are so many case examples of “lessons” that mix pre and post Cold War lessons and methods of struggle that it is only possible to touch upon some of the more specific lessons involved. In broad terms, such lessons can be divided into two sets: those that affect political, psychological, and information warfare; and those that affect the way in which terrorist and insurgent movements attack or fight US forces in the field:

- **Co-opt the middle; create links to more moderate and popular causes:** Linking extremist action to popular causes, like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become a more common tactic in large part because the conflict has continued to escalate and has had such visibility. Many movements, however, have found additional ways to broaden their base. These include creating humanitarian and political wings; claiming to be pro-democracy and reform, attacking failed governance and corruption; calling opponents anti-Islamic; or invoking terms like Crusader, Zionist, imperialist, etc.
- **Exploit Arab satellite television as well as traditional media:** Islamist movements, Palestinian groups, and many others, have learned how to capture maximum exposure in regional media, use the Internet, and above all exploit the new Arab satellite news channels. In contrast, US officials often confuse their occasional presence with successful impact.
- **Maintain a strategy of constant attrition, but strike hard according to a calendar of turning points and/or at targets with high political, social, and economic impact:** Insurgents and Islamists in Afghanistan and Iraq (and in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other regional struggles) have learned the importance of a constant low-level body count and creating a steady climate of violence. This forces the US into a constant, large-scale security effort and ensures constant media coverage.

At the same time, insurgents and Islamists have shown a steadily more sophisticated capability to exploit holidays, elections and other political events, and sensitive targets both inside the countries that are the scene of their primary operations and in the US and the West. Attacks on Kurdish and Shi'ite religious festivals, and the Madrid bombings are cases in point.

Terrorists and insurgents know that such targeted and well timed attacks can successfully undermine the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and can help drive the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A handful of terrorists in Hamas and the PIJ, and the Israeli who killed Rabin, effectively defeated both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Dramatic incidents of violence in Beirut and Somalia have also created political and psychological conditions that have helped catalyze US withdrawal.

- **Push “hot buttons:” Try to find forms of attack that provoke disproportionate fear and “terror” force the US and its allies into costly, drastic, and sometimes provocative responses:** Terrorists and insurgents have found that attacks planned for maximum political and psychological effects often have the additional benefit of provoking over-reaction. Hamas and the PIJ exploited such tactics throughout the peace process.

The US response to the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon led to US over-reactions – particularly at the media and Congressional level – that helped alienate the Arab and Islamic worlds from the US. At a different level, a limited Anthrax attack had a massive psychological impact in the US, inflicted direct and indirect costs exceeding a billion dollars, drew immense publicity, and affected the operations of a key element of the US government for several weeks.

- **Game Western and outside media:** Use interview access, tapes, journalist hostage takings and killings, politically-led and motivated crowds, drivers and assistant to journalists, and timed and targeted attacks to attempt to manipulate Western and outside media. Manipulate US official briefings with planted questions.
- **Externalize the struggle:** Bring the struggle home to the US and its allies as in the cases of the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and Madrid. Get maximum media and political impact. Encourage a “clash between civilizations.” Avoid killing fellow Muslims and collateral damage. Appear to be attacking Israel indirectly. Undermine US ties to friendly Arab states.
- **Use Americans as proxies:** There is nothing new about using Americans as proxies for local regimes, or attacking them to win support for ideological positions and causes. There has, however, been steadily growing sophistication in the timing and nature of such attacks, and in exploiting softer targets such as American businessmen in the country of operations, on striking at US and allied

targets in other countries, or in striking at targets in the US. It is also clear that such attacks receive maximum political and media attention in the US.

- **Attack UN, NGO, Embassies, and Aid and foreign business operations:** Attacking such targets greatly reduces the ability to carry out nation building and stability operations to win hearts and minds. Attacking the “innocent,” and curtailing their operations or driving organizations out of country has become an important focus of insurgents and Islamist extremist attacks.
- **“Horror” attacks, atrocities, and alienation:** Whether or not the tactics were initially deliberate, insurgents in Iraq have found that atrocities like desecrating corpses and beheadings are effective political and psychological weapons for those Islamist extremists whose goal is to divide the West from the Islamic world, and create an unbridgeable “clash of civilizations.”

Experts have long pointed out that one of the key differences between Islamist extremist terrorism and previous forms of terrorism is that they are not seeking to negotiate with those they terrorize, but rather to create conditions that can drive the West away, undermine secular and moderate regimes in the Arab and Islamic worlds, and create the conditions under which they can create “Islamic” states according to their own ideas of “Puritanism.”

This is why it serves the purposes of Islamist extremists, as well as some of the more focused opponents of the US and the West, to create massive casualties and carry out major strikes even if the result is to provoke hostility and anger. The goal of Bin Laden and those like him is not to persuade the US or the West, it is rather to so alienate them from the Islamic and Arab world that the forces of secularism in the region will be sharply undermined, and Western secular influence can be controlled or eliminated. The goal of most Iraqi insurgents is narrower – drive the US and its allies out of Iraq – but involves many of the same methods.

Seen in this context, the more horrifying the attack the better. Simple casualties do not receive the same media attention. They are a reality of war. Killing (or sometimes releasing) innocent hostages does grab the attention of the world media. Large bombs in crowds do the same, as does picking targets whose innocence or media impact grabs headlines. Desecrating corpses, beheadings, and similar acts of violence get even more media attention -- at least for a while.

Such actions also breed anger and alienation in the US and the West and to provoke excessive political and media reactions, more stringent security measures, violent responses and all of the other actions that help provoke a “clash of civilizations.” The US and the West are often provoked into playing into the hands of such attackers.

At the same time, any attack or incident that provokes massive media coverage and political reactions, appears to be a “victory” to those who support Islamist extremism or those who are truly angry at the US – even though the actual body count is often low, and victory does not mean creating stronger forces or winning political control. Each such incident can be used to damage the US and Western view of the Arab and Islamic worlds.

- **Keep “failed states” failed. Attack nation building and stability targets:** There is nothing new about attacking key economic targets, infrastructure, and aspects of governance critical to the functioning of the state in any effort to disrupt its economy, undermine law enforcement and security, and encourage instability. The Al Qaida and Taliban attacks on road works and aid workers; Iraqi insurgent and Islamist attacks on aid workers and projects; and their role in encouraging looting, sabotage, and theft does, however, demonstrate a growing sophistication in attacking stability efforts and tangible progress in aid and governance. These tactics also interact synergistically with the above tactics.
- **Confuse the identity of the attacker; exploit conspiracy theories:** Insurgents and Islamists have learned that a mix of silence, multiple claims to be the attacker, new names for attacking organizations, and uncertain levels of affiliation both make it harder for the US to respond. They also produce more media coverage and speculation.

As of yet, the number of true false flag operations has been limited. However, in Iraq and elsewhere, attacks have often accompanied by what seem to be deliberate efforts to advance conspiracy theories to confuse the identity of the attacker or to find ways to blame defenders of the US for being attacked. In addition, conspiracy theories charging the US with deliberately or carelessly failing to provide an adequate defense have been particularly effective.

- **Shelter in Mosques, Shrines, high value targets, and targets with high cultural impact:** Again, exploiting facilities of religious, cultural, and political sensitivity is not a new tactic. However, as operations against Sadr and in Fallujah have shown, the tactics raise the media profile, create a defensive deterrent, and can be exploited to make the US seem anti-Islamic or to be attacking a culture and not a movement.
- **Exploit, exaggerate, and falsify US attacks that cause civilian casualties and collateral damage, friendly fire against local allies, and incidents where the US can be blamed for being anti-Arab and anti-Islam:** Terrorists and insurgents have found they can use the media, rumor, and conspiracy theories to exploit the fact the US often fights a military battle without proper regard to the fact it is also fighting a political, ideological, and psychological war.

Real incidents of US misconduct such as the careless treatment of detainees and prisoners, and careless and excessive security measures are cases in point. So too are careless political and media rhetoric by US officials and military officers.

Bin Laden, the Iraqi insurgents, etc., all benefit from every Western action that unnecessarily angers or frustrates the Arab and Islamic worlds. They are not fighting to influence Western or world opinion; they are fighting a political and psychological war to dominate Iraq and the Arab and Islamic worlds.

Lessons About Methods of Attack and Combat

There is no tight dividing line between tactics focused on the political and psychological nature of war and military tactics. Individual Islamist extremist and insurgent movements are also generally highly “localized” in character and adapt to the specific conditions they must operate in. However, some of the major adaptations that insurgents and terrorists are making in terms of warfare and modes of attack include:

- **Mix Crude and sophisticated IEDS:** Hezbollah should be given credit for having first perfected the use of explosives in well structured ambushes, although there is nothing new about such tactics -- the Afghans used them extensively against the Soviets. Iraq has, however, provided a unique opportunity for insurgents and Islamist extremists to make extensive use of IEDs by exploiting its mass stocks of arms. The Iraqi attackers have also learned to combine the extensive use of low grade IEDs, more carefully targeted sophisticated IEDs, and very large car bombs and other devices to create a mix of threats and methods that is much more difficult to counter than reliance on more consistent types of bombs and target sets.
- **Suicide bombs:** The use of such tactics has increased steadily since 1999, in part due to the high success rate relative to alternative methods of attack. It is not always clear that suicide bombing techniques are tactically necessary outside struggles like the Israel-Palestinian conflict, where one side can enforce a very tight area and perimeter, and point target security. In many cases, timed devices might produce the same damage.

Events in Iraq have shown, however, that suicide bombers still have a major psychological impact and gain exceptional media attention. They also serve as symbols of dedication and commitment, can be portrayed as a form of Islamic martyrdom, and attract more political support and attention among those sympathetic to the cause involved.

At the same time, regional experts must be very careful about perceiving such methods of attack as either a recent development or as Islamic in character. For instance, Hezbollah used suicide bombings in the 1980s, with an attack on the US Embassy in Beirut in 1981 and in six attacks in 1983 killing 384 people-- including 241 US Marines. Moreover, Hindu terrorists and the Tamil Tigers made extensive use of suicide bombings long before the Palestinians. In fact, Hindu terrorists still lead in the amount of suicide

bombings committed by a particular group. The Tamil tigers have carried out 168 such attacks since 1987 versus 16 for the Hezbollah versus Israel (1983-1985), 44 for the Palestinians (1999-2004), and 28 for Al Qaida (1999-2004). A profiling of the attackers in some 168 attacks also found that only a comparative few could in any sense be called religious fanatics rather than believers in a cause.¹

- **Attack LOCs, rear area, and support activity:** Iran and Afghanistan have shown that dispersed attacks on logistics and support forces often offer a higher chance of success than attacks on combat forces and defended sites, and makes the fight wars based on “deep support” rather than “deep strikes” beyond the FEBA.
- **Better use of light weapons and more advanced types:** While much will depend on the level of insurgent and Islamist extremist access to arms, Iraq and Afghanistan have seen a steady improvement in the use of systems like mortars and anti-tank weapons, and efforts to acquire Manpads and ATGMs. The quality of urban and road ambushes has improved strikingly in Iraq, as has the ability to set up rapid attacks, and exploit the vulnerability of soft skinned vehicles.
- **Create informal distributed networks—deliberately or accidentally:** Like drug dealers before them, Islamist extremists and insurgents have learned enough about COMINT and SIGINT to stop using most vulnerable communications assets, and to bypass many – if not most – of the efforts to control cash flow and money transfers.

The use of messengers, direct human contact, and more random methods of electronic communication are all cases in point. At the broader level, however, insurgents in Iraq seem to have adapted to having cells and elements operate with considerable autonomy, and by loosely linking their operations by using the media and reporting on the overall pattern of attacks to help determine the best methods and targets.

Smuggling, drug sales, theft and looting, and direct fund transfers also largely bypass efforts to limit operations through controls on banking systems, charities, etc. Under these conditions, a lack of central control and cohesive structure may actually be an asset – allowing highly flexible operations with minimal vulnerability to roll-up and attack.

The existence of parallel, and not competing, groups of hostile non-state actors provides similar advantages and has the same impact. The fact that insurgent and Islamist extremist groups operate largely independently, and use different tactics and target sets, greatly complicates US operations and probably actually increases overall effectiveness.

- **Adapt technology to terrorism and insurgency; GPS as an aid to dispersal, hideouts, rendezvous, smuggling and caches – “virtual garrisons in the sand”:** GPS coordinates provide a way of creating caches and coordinate points in mountain and desert areas with little of the complexity and confusion experienced in past conflicts. What were once largely special forces methods are now common place insurgent methods.
- **Make cities and towns urban sanctuaries and defensive morasses:** Iraqi and Palestinian insurgents have both found that cities with supportive and/or accepting populations can be made into partial sanctuaries and centers for defensive fighting and ambushes, and that tactical defeat can normally be dealt with by dispersal and hiding among the civilian population. Such tactics combine well with attacks on local authorities and security forces friendly to the US, efforts to block nation building at the local, and efforts to exploit religion, ethnicity, tribalism, etc.
- **Use of tunnels, shelters, mountain areas, and friendly groups and territories:** If Iraq has been the area training hostile insurgents and Islamist extremists in urban warfare and MOBA, Afghanistan and Western Pakistan have provided virtually the opposite set of lessons. So far, it is important to note that insurgents and terrorists have learned that IS&R assets normally have only had a significant impact on their traditional advantages in knowing the terrain and concealment when they are deployed in very high densities in local areas, and there is a significant hostile troop presence on the ground.
- **Use neighboring states as partial sanctuaries:** While scarcely a new tactic, the Taliban and Al Qaida have repeated a standard lesson of guerrilla warfare and have expanded their area of operation into Western Pakistan and Central Asia, expanding the area of operations beyond national boundaries and creating a partial sanctuary. Iraqi insurgents have used cross border operations and taken advantage of the difficulties in securing the Syrian, Iranian, and Saudi borders. The Vietnamese used the same tactic in Cambodia and Laos, however, and so have many other insurgent forces. The idea of securing a nation based on securing the territory within its tactical boundaries is often a tactical myth.
- **Exploit weaknesses in US battle damage assessment (BDA) and damage characterization capabilities:** Al Qaida, the Taliban, Iraqi insurgents, and other Islamist extremists have all learned that US intelligence is optimized around characterizing, counting, and targeting things, rather than people, and the US has poor capability to measure and characterize infantry and insurgent numbers, wounded, and casualties. They exploit these weaknesses in dispersal, in conducting attacks, in concealing the extent of losses, and in manipulating the media by claiming civilian casualties and collateral damage.
- **Carry out sequential ambushes:** Increasingly carry out complex mixes of sequential ambushes to draw in and attack US and Allied responders to the initial or previous follow-on attacks.

- **Exploit slow US reaction times:** Learn to exploit the delays in US response efforts, and rigidities in US tactical C⁴I behavior, to attack quickly and disperse.
- **Exploit fixed US patterns of behavior:** Take advantage of a US tendency to repeat tactics, security, movement patterns, and other behavior; find vulnerabilities and attack.
- **Use “resurgence”:** Disperse under pressure or when defeat seems likely. Let the US take an “empty” city or objective. “Resurge” when the US tactical presence declines.
- **Use Incident numbers and tactics that strain or defeat US intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (IS&R) assets:** There is no question that assets like RPVs, aircraft, SIGINT systems, etc. can provide significant capability *when they are available*. It is unclear whether it is deliberate or not, but the geographic spread and daily incident count in Iraq indicates that insurgent movements and actions often reach numbers too large to cover. In fact, the US averaged some 1,700-2,000 patrols per day during May 2004. While it is nice to talk about netcentric warfare, it is a lot harder to get a big enough net.

Hostile movements also have learned that the US has far less ability to track and characterize irregular forces, insurgent/terrorist teams, and urban and dispersed infantry than forces using mechanized weapons or significant numbers of vehicles. Blending into the civilian population has worked well for local insurgents and Islamists in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and they seem to be learning that they can exploit rules of engagement where the US and its allies do not have soldiers or agents on the ground to perform targeting and IFF functions. As valuable as IS&R assets are, they do not provide some critical kinds of situational awareness with any reliability.

These lessons do, however, need to be considered in light of the fact the Hezbollah was able to use carefully structured ambushes, bombs, and other methods of attack to counter a much denser system of IS&R assets in South Lebanon. In practice, IS&R has proved to be a major aid to, and not substitute for, troop presence and active HUMINT.

- **Choose a vulnerable US center of gravity:** Deny the US a large, cohesive enemy while attacking small or dispersed elements of US and friendly forces, facilities, or targets.
- **Counter US IS&R capabilities by adapting new techniques of communication and interaction:** The steady leakage of details on US and allied intelligence collection methods has led Islamist extremist and terrorist movements to make more use of couriers and direct financial transfer; use electronic communications

more safely; screen recruits more carefully, disperse better, and improve their hierarchy and cell structure.

- **Counter US IS&R assets with superior HUMINT:** Developments in Iraq indicate that the US faces a repetition of its experience in Vietnam in the sense that as various insurgent factions organize, they steadily improve their intelligence and penetration of organizations like the CPA, CJTF-7, the Iraqi government and security forces, and the Iraqi factions backing nation building.

The fact that the North Vietnamese had a decisive advantage in HUMINT, particularly once the US began to pull out, is often ignored in studies of the Vietnam War, as is the fact that the USG in Washington ignored repeated warnings from intelligence officers in the US embassy and PACOM that the hostile HUMINT network was vastly larger than the US would officially admit, and included many supposedly safe and loyal sources supporting the Embassy, US units, and the US media.

This became all too clear after the fall of Saigon. The HUMINT penetration was near total, the number of agents was about three times what the USG officially acknowledged, and an almost incredible number of drivers and others supporting the media turned out to have some ties to the North Vietnamese. Many other Vietnamese were loyal to the US – and we abandoned them when we pulled out. Loyalty was a very mixed bag.

Like Vietnam, Iraq is a warning that hostile HUMINT sources are often pushed into providing data because of family ties, a fear of being on the losing side, direct and indirect threats, etc. In Iraq's case, it seems likely that family, clan, and ethnic loyalties have made many supposedly loyal Iraqis become at least part time sources, and that US vetting will often be little more than either a review of past ties or checks on the validity of data being provided. The end result may be an extremely high degree of transparency on US, other Coalition, Governing Council, and every other aspect of US operations. This will often provide excellent targeting data on key US and allied officials, events, etc. It can include leverage and blackmail, and vulnerability data, as well as warning of US and other military operations. Dual loyalty and HUMINT penetration of Iraqi security and military forces may be the rule, rather than the exception.

Key Overarching Lessons

No lists of this kind can begin to be complete, or serve as a basis for predicting future changes. Rather, it portrays the fact that hostile movements are adaptive, they learn from experience, they find new ways to fight asymmetrically, and they find new US and allied vulnerabilities over time. It is also a further illustration of the fact that guerrilla wars can rarely be won by battles of military attrition if the guerrilla movement has a strong political and ideological component and is not defeated in political and ideological terms.

If there are any broad counter lessons that the US should learn from such changes in Post-Cold War tactics, the first is that US efforts to use political, psychological, and information warfare are at least as critical as US military operations in direct combat.

Second, and more importantly, the concepts of Phase IV, “stability,” and “nation building” the US employed during the first states of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were fundamentally wrong and self-defeating. Such activities were perceived as phased, secondary priorities that essentially wasted skilled manpower and resources. Winning the war was given a far higher priority than winning the peace. They should have been seen as having more ultimate strategic importance than defeating “conventional” enemy and insurgent forces.

The US should have made shaping hearts and minds a key priority from the start of combat. The US should also have carried out stability operations from the first day of combat, and understood that only successful Phase IV, “stability,” and “nation building” operations can achieve successful grand strategic results against determined and highly motivated Islamist extremists and other insurgents with strong popular support.

The US and the West must understand they are fighting a region-wide political and ideological struggle at the same time they are fighting conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. They must do everything possible to avoid being trapped into helping to create a real “clash of civilizations.” The US and the West must reach out to Arab and Islamic moderates and intellectuals, to strengthen ties to friendly regional regimes, and concentrate on defeating the real enemy: Islamist extremists, terrorists, and insurgents who are just as much the enemy of reform and progress in their own countries and cultures as they are of the US and the West.

Lessons and Non-Lessons Regarding Proliferation

Ever since the Gulf War, it has been clear that local powers and movements perceive weapons of mass destruction as a potential counter to US conventional capabilities and a way of striking decisively at the US. This “lesson,” however, needs to be kept in perspective. The race to acquire weapons of mass destruction in the region dates back to the 1950s. It has been constantly kept to the fore by Israel’s undeclared deterrent, and was reinforced both by Iraq’s behavior during the Iran-Iraq War, and UNSCOM’s discoveries after the Gulf War. It doesn’t take US military success to stimulate proliferation. In practice, North Korea’s transfer of missile technology, and Pakistan’s willingness to sell P2 centrifuge technology and Chinese fissile weapons design may also be a more important recent stimulus.

The fact that Al Qaida was found to have conducted extensive studies of how to acquire weapons of mass destruction in Afghanistan is an important warning; so too are their efforts to attack Jordan in March 2004 with chemical weapons, the Ricin discoveries in the UK, and the knowledge that designs for reasonably sophisticated devices are available from commercial publishers and on the internet. The threat of terrorists using such weapons in attacks is clearly present and growing. Hostile movements are also

aware that the US ability to track the source of covert attacks is limited. The failure to find the culprit responsible for the Anthrax attacks on the Capital makes this all too clear.

At the same time, the first novels describing the potential benefits to terrorists in using weapons of mass destruction appeared in the 1960s. The US took the possibility of covert state-sponsored Spetsnaz attacks using such weapons seriously from the 1990s on. The perceived vulnerability of US theater nuclear weapons in Europe from threats like Palestinian extremists, Badr-Meinhof, the Red Brigades, etc, was taken seriously enough to make major new efforts to protect such weapons in 1973 – an effort that began long before the October War. The idea of terrorist and proxy attacks is scarcely new, or a post-Cold War development.

Several other points:

- **Simply acquiring weapons of mass destruction is not the same as knowing how to use them or what their effects will be.** There are many scenarios in which the nation or movement acquiring such weapons will have no real way to test their effectiveness, know little about targeting, and have to use uncertain delivery methods.
- **Lethality and effect differ radically by type of weapon of mass destruction.** Chemical and radiological weapons generally have limited lethality except in very large quantities. Biological weapons can have limited to “nuclear equivalent” lethality. Nuclear effects alter radically according to yield and factors like height of burst.
- **Having or using such weapons justifies response at almost any level:** While acquiring such weapons may have a deterrent value, it also fundamentally changes the military response likely to be used against the holder. At present, however, it seems likely that many Middle Eastern states and radical movements have not really thought much beyond the acquisition phase and to the war fighting/use phase and its aftermath.

In short, it is all very well to talk about proliferation as a “lesson” to regional states, Islamist extremists, and insurgent movements, but a lesson to do what? And, with what probable consequences?

¹ See Col. Ernie Howard, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terror," Air University Warfare Studies Institute, April 2004.