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Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Lessons of Recent Conflicts in the Middle East

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The very nature of warfare is changing in a region where nations have previously tended to focus on building the largest possible conventional forces and obtaining the most advanced major weapons. On the one hand, the "revolution in military affairs" (RMA), modern technology, professional forces, and jointness are transforming the nature of the conventional capabilities of the US, and inevitably many of its European and regional allies. On the other hand, hostile, and potentially hostile, states are adapting in their own way, as are extremist, radical, and terrorist movements.

For all of the advantages the RMA offered in defeating Iraq's conventional forces and deposing Saddam Hussein, Iraqi insurgents have since found ways to counter many of the advantages of the US and its allies. Similar trends have emerged in Afghanistan, and in the fighting between the US and the Taliban and Al Qaida. Both sides learn and adapt. War remains a duel where both sides must constantly adapt, and one that is becoming steadily more asymmetric with time.

Changes in the Nature of Warfare that Affect All Sides

Like all regions in the world, the Middle East is being affected by radical changes in tactics, technology, and training. These lessons have been all too clear in the evolving pattern of conflict in the Gulf War, Afghan Conflict, and the Iraq War. The most critical of these changes include:

- **The "Revolution in Military Affairs:"** Changes in tactics, technology, and training which exploit new intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (IS&R) systems, precision targeting and munitions, long range strike systems, high mobility, and other assets to fundamentally change the pace and intensity of warfare, and exploit a qualitative "revolution" in military technology,

- **Combined Arms and Joint Warfare:** Methods of warfare that eliminate the traditional organizational and tactical barriers between the elements of a given military service ("combined arms"); and which integrate the operations of different military services (joint warfare)**.**

- **C4I/BM/IS&R, "Blue" and "Red Force" Trackers, and "Net-centric Warfare":** C4I (command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence); BM (battle management), and IS&R (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) are all subsets of the "revolution in military affairs," but the advances in each area are so great that each is a driving force behind changes in the regional balance**.** Moreover, the growing ability to link these advances in a "net" that ties the together in ways that can provide a comprehensive, near-real time, picture of the battlefield, and the location and character of friendly and threat forces, is making fundamental differences in the nature of warfare.

- **Precision and platform upgrades:** Military investment and modernization have seen a shift in emphasis to more advanced munitions and precision weapons, with less investment in new platforms like tanks, aircraft, and ships. Major investments are being made in military electronics.

- **Professionalism and manpower quality: New human factors and capabilities:** Advances in both tactics and technology have made human factors steadily more--not less--important. Modern forces, combined arms, and joint warfare all require a far higher degree of professional, training, and experience than in the past. They have created a new premium for giving junior officers and other ranks more initiative, and for developing cadres of effective and well trained non-commissioned offers (NCOs) and technicians. Conversely, they have made short service conscripts and reserves with limited training steadily less valuable.

- **Sustainability:** Logistics, maintenance, readiness, and repair and recovery have always been critical aspects of military operations. During the last four decades, however, the value of highly ready forces that can be sustained for prolonged periods of intense warfare has become steadily more apparent, while it has become clear that forces without high levels of sustainability cannot fight at rates of maneuver and intensity that allow them to compete. The ability to sustain forces in long-range maneuvers and deployments is equally critical.

- **Asymmetric warfare:** The development of new approaches to warfare where each side uses a radically different mix of strategy, tactics, technology and methods of warfare to best exploit its opponents' weaknesses while minimizing its own weaknesses and vulnerabilities**.**

- **Proliferation**: The acquisition and deployment of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons, and long-range delivery systems like ballistic missiles, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Israel, Syria, Iran, and Iraq have all at least made efforts at developing CBRN weapons, and Saudi Arabia has acquired long-range surface-to-surface missiles. Iraq and Libya, however, are no longer active proliferators.

- **Terrorism:** Terrorism is the systematic use of terror, especially as a means of coercion. It has become part of the way in which both states and non-state actors conduct warfare. The region has suffered from major terrorist attacks since the early phases of the Arab-Israeli conflict, but secular terrorism became a major aspect of the military balance in the late 1960s, and religious terrorism has been a major aspect of the balance since the mid-1990s.

- **Covert and proxy warfare:** Many powers have not been able to keep up in the race to modernize their military forces or are simply too small to confront the major regional military powers or the power projection forces of outside nations like the US. Shifting to the use of covert warfare, or proxy forces like terrorist and extremist groups provides a means of asymmetric warfare where states can seek to avoid direct confrontation or combat with larger powers.

- **Superterrorism:** The growth of extremist and terrorist threats is increasing the risk of an escalation of terrorism, covert, or proxy warfare to use chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons against states or other opponents, and potentially the use of precision weapons or other devices to produce catastrophic damage by attacking critical infrastructure targets like desalination plants, major energy facilities, etc.

- **Insurgency and Guerilla Warfare:** The conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have shown that low-level insurgency and guerilla warfare remain an effective method of asymmetric warfare that can challenge even the most advanced conventional forces in both built-up populated areas and rough terrain.

- **External and regional coalitions:** State to state and internal civil conflicts are still a major aspect of the Middle East balance. Recent wars have shown, however, that coalitions can be rapidly developed which involve states from outside the Middle East and North Africa, and assemblies of "coalitions of the willing" that draw together disparate force elements from throughout the region.

- **Information and political warfare:** Middle Eastern conflicts have always had a significant political and propaganda dimension. The political and information aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Gulf War, Iraq War, and War on Terrorism have all shown, however, that information warfare per se has become steadily more important over time. This process has been accelerated by developments like satellite television, the emergence of major independent broadcasters, the Internet, cell phones, and fax machines.

- **Economic warfare and sanctions:** Oil exporting nations first tried to use oil as a weapon in the mid-1960s, but did not succeed until after the October War of 1973. Since that time, the US, Britain, and UN have made aggressive use of economic sanctions, most notably against Libya, Iran, and Iraq.

The Factors that Favor the US, Western Forces, and Adaptive Middle Eastern States: The Impact of the Revolution in Military Affairs and its Impact on Asymmetric Warfare

Like all developments in warfare, there are developments that favor the West and moderate Middle Eastern regimes, and there are developments that favor their opponents. In broad terms, each side has a different mix of strengths and vulnerabilities. This mix tends to favor the West and moderate Middle Eastern regimes in conventional warfare, and radical regimes, Islamist extremist, insurgent, and terrorist groups in asymmetric warfare.

Factors that Favor the US, Western Forces, and Adaptive Middle Eastern States

The ability to exploit the matrix of technologies in the "revolution in military affairs" gives those few countries with the capability to do so a tremendous advantage as long as warfare remains relatively conventional in terms of the forces engaged.

What may be less obvious is the importance of human factors and of having the kind of well educated, well trained, and experienced forces capable of adapting to new forms of warfare. Manpower quality is an "intangible" that there are no easy ways to quantify, but which is even more critical to succeeding in dealing with these changes than investments in equipment and technology. All of the forces the drive the RMA also tend to exacerbate long-standing problems in the quality of regional military manpower.

The value of conscripts and low quality pools of poorly trained and equipped reserves is increasingly uncertain when military forces have to execute complex tactics and operate advanced military equipment. Experience in realistic exercise training, in operating as combat teams, and joint and combined arms training have become far more important. So is the ability to create and retain technical cadres, NCOs, and "hands on" officers capable of a high degree of initiative and leading by example.

The key factors that Favor the US, Western Forces, and Adaptive Middle Eastern states are:

- *Decoupling of political and military responsibility:* No war is ever free of command controversy or friction between political and military leadership. However, the Coalition forces fought the Gulf War with effective delegation of responsibility for military decisions to military commanders. RMA forces are likely to enjoy the same advantage in mid-to-high-intensity wars where rival military forces will be more politicized, and organized more to suit the regime's internal security needs than to conduct modern joint operations.

- *Unity of command:* The level of unity of command, and "fusion," achieved during the Gulf War was scarcely perfect, but it was far more effective than that possible in most states. Advanced powers have improved its unity of command and ability to conduct joint operations.

- *Jointness, Combined operations, combined arms, and the "AirLand Battle":* Advanced powers can use technology to train and integrate in ways that allow far more effective approaches to jointness, combined arms and combined operations. They have developed tactics that closely integrated air and land operations.

- *Emphasis on maneuver:* The US had firepower and attrition warfare until the end of the Vietnam War. In the years that followed, it converted its force structure to place an equal emphasis on maneuver and deception. This emphasis has been adopted by Britain and France and other advanced states.

- *Emphasis on deception and strategic/tactical innovation:* No country has a monopoly on the use of deception and strategic/tactical innovation. High technology powers with advanced battle management and information systems will, however, be able to penetrate the enemy's decision-making system and react so quickly that the opponent cannot compete.

- *"24 hour war" - Superior night, all-weather, and beyond-visual-range warfare:* "Visibility" is always relative in combat. There is no such thing as a perfect night vision or all-weather combat system, or way of acquiring perfect information at long-ranges. Advanced technology air and land forces, however, have far better training

and technology for such combat than they ever had in the past, and are designed to wage warfare continuously at night and in poor weather. Equally important, they are far more capable of taking advantage of the margin of extra range and tactical information provided by superior technology.

- *Near Real-Time Integration of C^{4}I/BM/T/BDA:* New C^{4}I/BM/T/BDA organization, technology, and software systems make it possible to integrate various aspects of command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence (C^{4}I); battle management (BM); targeting (T); and battle damage assessment (BDA) to achieve a near real time integration and decision making-execution cycle.

- *A new tempo of operations:* Superiority in virtually every aspect of targeting, intelligence gathering and dissemination, integration of combined arms, multi-service forces, and night and all-weather warfare make it possible to achieve both a new tempo of operations and one far superior to that of the enemy.

- *A new tempo of sustainability:* Advanced forces will have maintainability, reliability, reparability, and the speed and overall mobility of logistic, service support, and combat support force activity that broadly match their maneuver and firepower capabilities. The benefits of these new capabilities are already reflected in such critical areas as the extraordinarily high operational availability and sortie rates of Western combat aircraft, and the ability to support the movement of heliborne and armored forces.

- *Rapidly moving, armed, computerized supply and logistics:* Rather than steadily occupy and secure rear areas, and create large logistic and rear area supply forces, focus on creating computerized logistic systems capable of tracing the location of supplies and the needs of forward combat units. Send supplies and service support units forward to meet demand on a near real-time basis. Send supply, logistics, maintenance, and recovery units forward to meet demand using air power and long-range firepower to secure the lines of communication and flanks of land forces. Arm and train logistic and service support units to defend themselves against insurgents and light attacking forces. Ensure that armor, rotary wing, and fixed wing combat units can move forward as quickly as possible.

- *Beyond-visual-range air combat, air defense suppression, air base attacks, and airborne C^{4}I/BM:* The Coalition in the Gulf had a decisive advantage in air combat training, beyond-visual-range air combat capability, anti-radiation missiles, electronic warfare, air base and shelter and kill capability, stealth and unmanned long-range strike systems, IFF and air control capability, and airborne C^{4}I/BM systems like the E-3 and ABCCC. These advantages allowed the Coalition to win early and decisive air supremacy in the Gulf and Kosovo conflicts, and paralyze the Iraqi Air Force in the Iraq War. Advanced forces will steadily improve the individual capability of these systems and their integration into "net-centric" warfare.

- *Focused and effective interdiction bombing*: Advanced forces organize effectively to use deep strike capabilities to carry out a rapid and effective pattern of focus strategic bombing where planning is sufficiently well coupled to intelligence and meaningful strategic objectives so that such strikes achieve the major military objectives that the planner sets. At the same time, targeting, force allocation, and precision kill capabilities have advanced to the point where interdiction bombing and strikes are far more lethal and strategically useful than in previous conflicts.

- *Expansion of the battle field: "Deep Strike":* As part of its effort to offset the Warsaw Pact's numerical superiority, US tactics and technology emphasized using AirLand battle capabilities to extend the battlefield far beyond the immediate forward "edge" of the battle area (FEBA) using advanced near-real time targeting systems, precision weapons, and area munitions. The UN Coalition exploited the resulting mix of targeting capability, improved air strike capabilities, and land force capabilities in ways during the Gulf War that played an important role in degrading Iraqi ground forces during the air phase of the war, and which helped the Coalition break through Iraqi defenses and exploit the breakthrough. In Kosovo, the US and NATO began to employ more advanced "deep strike" targeting technologies and precision strike systems. These capabilities made striking further advances in the Iraq War, and far more advanced systems are in development.

- *Technological superiority in many critical areas of weaponry:* The West and some moderate regional states have a critical "edge" in key weapons like tanks, other armored fighting vehicles, artillery systems, long-range strike systems, attack aircraft, air defense aircraft, surface-to-air missiles, space, attack helicopters, naval systems, sensors, battle management, and a host of other areas. This superiority goes far beyond the technical "edge" revealed by "weapon on weapon" comparisons. Coalition forces exploited technology in "systems" that integrated mixes of different weapons into other aspects of force capability and into the overall force structure.

- *Integration of precision-guided weapons into tactics and force structures:* Advanced forces exploit a technical "edge" in the ability to use precision-guided weapons coupled to far more realistic training in using such weapons, and the ability to link their employment to far superior reconnaissance and targeting capability.

- *Realistic combat training and use of technology and simulation:* During the Gulf and Iraq Wars, the US and Britain took advantage of training methods based on realistic combined arms and AirLand training, large-scale training, and adversary training. These efforts proved far superior to previous methods and were coupled to a far more realistic and demanding system for ensuring the readiness of the forces involved. They show the value of kinds of training that allow forces to rapidly adapt to the special and changing conditions of war.

- *Emphasis on forward leadership and delegation:* Technology, tactics, and training all support aggressive and innovative leadership.

- *Heavy reliance on NCOs and highly skilled enlisted personnel:* Advanced forces place heavy reliance on the technical skills, leadership quality, and initiative of non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and experienced enlisted personnel.

- *High degree of overall readiness:* Military readiness is a difficult term to define since it involves so many aspects of force capability. RMA forces, however, will have more realistic standards for measuring readiness and ensuring proper reporting, and adequate funding over a sustained period of time.

The Vulnerabilities of Less Advanced Powers

The vulnerabilities of less advanced powers are in many ways the mirror image of the strengths inherent in the RMA and force transformation and make a sharp contrast in relative capabilities:

- *Authoritarianism and over-centralization of the effective command structure:* The high command of many countries is dependent on compartmentalized, over-centralized C^4I/BM systems that do not support high tempo warfare, combined arms, or combined operations and lack tactical and technical sophistication. Many forces or force elements report through a separate chain of command. C^4I/BM systems often are structured to separate the activity of regular forces from elite, regime security, and ideological forces. Systems often ensure major sectors and corps commanders report to the political leadership, and separations occur within the branches of a given service. Intelligence is compartmentalized and poorly disseminated. Air force command systems are small, unit oriented and unsuited for large-scale force management. Coordination of land-based air defense and strike systems is poorly integrated, vulnerable, and/or limited in volume handing capability. Combined operations and combined arms coordination are poor, and command interference at the political level is common.

- *Lack of strategic assessment capability:* Many nations lack sufficient understanding of Western war fighting capabilities to understand the impact of the revolution in military affairs, the role of high technology systems, and the impact of the new tempo of war. Other countries have important gaps in their assessment capabilities reflecting national traditions or prejudices.

- *Major Weaknesses in battle management, command, control, communications, intelligence, targeting, and battle damage assessment:* No Middle Eastern country except Israel has meaningful access to space-based systems, or advanced theater reconnaissance and intelligence systems unless data are provided by states outside the region. Most lack sophisticated reconnaissance, intelligence, and targeting assets at the national level or in their individual military services. Beyond-visual-range imagery and targeting is restricted to largely vulnerable and easily detectable reconnaissance aircraft or low performance UAVs. Many rely on photo data for imagery, and have cumbersome download and analysis cycles in interpreting intelligence. Many have exploitable vulnerabilities to information warfare. Most are limited in the sophistication of their electronic warfare, SIGINT, and COMINT systems. Their communications security is little better, or worse, than commercial communications security. They have severe communications interconnectivity, volume handling, and dissemination problems. Additionally, they cannot provide the software and connectivity necessary to fully exploit even commercial or ordinary military systems. They lack the C^4I/BM capability to manage complex deep strikes, complex large-scale armor and artillery operations, effective electronic intelligence, and rapid cycles of reaction in decision-making.

- *Lack of cohesive force quality:* Most countries' forces have major land combat units and squadrons with very different levels of proficiency. Political, historical, and equipment supply factors often mean that most units have much lower levels of real-world combat effectiveness than the best units. Further, imbalances in combat support, service support, and logistic support create significant additional imbalances in sustainability and operational effectiveness. Many states add to these problems, as well as lack of force cohesion, by creating politicized or ideological divisions within their forces.

- *Shallow offensive battlefields:* Most states face severe limits in extending the depth of the battlefield because they lack the survivable platforms and sensors, communications, and data processing to do so. These problems are particularly severe in wars of maneuver, in wars involving the extensive use of strike aircraft, and in battles where a growing strain is placed on force cohesion.

- *Manpower quality:* Many states rely on the mass use of poorly trained conscripts. They fail to provide adequate status, pay, training, and career management for NCOs and technicians. Many forces fail to provide professional career development for officers and joint and combined arms training. Promotion often occurs for political reasons or out of nepotism and favoritism.

- *Slow tempo of operations:* Most military forces have not fought a high-intensity air or armored battle. They are at best capable of medium tempo operations, and their pace of operations is often dependent on the survival of some critical mix of facilities or capabilities.

- *Lack of Sustainability, Recovery, and Repair:* These initial problems in the tempo of operations are often exacerbated by a failure to provide for sustained air operations and high sortie rates, long-range sustained maneuver, and battlefield/combat unit recovery and repair. Most forces are heavily dependent on re-supply to deal with combat attrition whereas Western forces can use field recovery, maintenance, and repair.

- *Inability to prevent air superiority:* Many states have far greater air defense capability on paper than they do in practice. Most have not fought in any kind of meaningful air action in the last decade, and many have never fought any significant air action in their history. C^4I/BM problems are critical in this near real-time environment. Most countries lack sophisticated air combat and land-based air defense simulation and training systems, and do not conduct effective aggressor and large-scale operations training. Efforts to transfer technology, organization, and training methods from other nations on a patchwork basis often leaves critical gaps in national capability, even where other capabilities are effective.

- *Problems in air-to-air combat:* Air combat training levels are often low and the training unrealistic. Pilot and other crew training standards are insufficient, or initial training is not followed up with sustained training. There is little effective aggressor training. AWACS and ABCCC capabilities are lacking. EW capabilities are modified commercial grade capabilities. Most aircraft lack effective air battle management systems, and have limited beyond-visual-range and look down shoot down capability. Most air forces supplied primarily by Russia or Eastern European states depend heavily on obsolete ground-controlled vectoring for intercepts. Key radar and control centers are static and vulnerable to corridor blasting.

- *Problems in land-based air defense:* Many states lack anything approaching an integrated land-based air defense system, and rely on outdated or obsolete radars, missile units, and other equipment. Other states must borrow or adapt air defense battle management capabilities from supplier states, and have limited independent capability for systems integration — particularly at the software level. They lack the mix of heavy surface-to-air missile systems to cover broad areas, or must rely on obsolete systems that can be killed, countered by EW, and/or bypassed. Most Middle Eastern short-range air defense systems do not protect against attacks with stand-off precision weapons or using stealth.

- *Lack of effective survivable long-range strike systems:* Many nations have the capability to launch long-range effective air and missile strikes, but have severe operational problems in using them. Refueling capabilities do not exist or are in such small numbers as to be highly vulnerable. Long-range targeting and battle damage assessment capabilities are lacking. Training is limited and unrealistic in terms of penetrating effective air defenses. Platforms are export systems without the full range of supplier avionics or missile warheads. Assets are not survivable, or lose much of their effective strike capability once dispersed.

- *Combined (Joint) Operations, Combined Arms, and Interoperability:* Many states fail to emphasize the key advances in the integration of warfighting capabilities from the last decade. They have not developed combined

arms capabilities within each service, much less inter-service joint warfare capabilities. When they do emphasize combined arms and joint operations, they usually leave serious gaps in some aspects of national warfighting capability. There is little or no emphasis on interoperability with neighboring powers.

- *Rough/Special terrain warfare:* Although many forces have armed helicopters, large numbers of tracked vehicles, and can create effective rough terrain defenses if given time, they have problems in conducting high tempo operations. Many tend to be road-bound for critical support and combined arms functions, and lack training for long-range, high-intensity engagements in rough terrain. Many are not properly trained to exploit the potential advantages of their own region. They are either garrison forces, or forces that rely on relatively static operations in pre-determined field positions. These problems are often compounded by a lack of combat engineering and barrier crossing equipment.

- *Night and All-Weather Warfare:* Most forces lack adequate equipment for night and poor weather warfare, and particularly for long-range direct and indirect fire engagement, and cohesive, sustainable, large-scale maneuver.

- *Armored operations:* Most countries have sharply different levels of armored warfare proficiency within their armored and mechanized forces. Few units have advanced training and simulation facilities. Most land forces have interoperability and standardization problems within their force structure — particularly in the case of other armored fighting vehicles where they often deploy a very wide range of types. Many are very tank heavy, without the mix of other land force capabilities necessary to deploy infantry, supporting artillery, and anti-tank capabilities at the same speed and maneuver proficiency as tank units. Most forces have poor training in conducting rapid, large-scale armored and combined operations at night and in poor weather. Effective battle management declines sharply at the force-wide level — as distinguished from the major combat unit level — and sometimes even in coordinating brigade or division-sized operations.

- *Artillery operations:* Many states have large numbers of artillery weapons, but serious problems in training and tactics. They lack long-range targeting capability and the ability to rapidly shift and effectively allocate fire. Many rely on towed weapons with limited mobility, or lack off-road support vehicles. Combined arms capabilities are limited. Many units are only effective in using mass fire against enemies that maneuver more slowly than they do.

- *Attack and combat helicopter units:* Some countries do have elite elements, but many do not properly train their helicopter units, or integrate them into combined or joint operations.

- *Commando, paratroop, and special forces:* Many countries have elite combat units that are high quality forces at the individual combat unit level. In many cases, however, they are not trained or organized for effective combined and joint warfare, or for sustained combat. This seriously weakens their effectiveness in anything but limited combat missions.

- *Combat training:* Training generally has serious problems and gaps, which vary by country. Units or force elements differ sharply in training quality. Training problems are complicated by conversion and expansion, conscript turnover, and a lack of advanced technical support for realistic armored, artillery, air-to-air, surface-to-air, and offensive air training. Mass sometimes compensates, but major weaknesses remain.

- *Inability to use weapons of mass destruction effectively:* Any state can use weapons of mass destruction to threaten or intimidate another or to attack population centers and fixed area targets. At the same time, this is not the same as having an effective capability and doctrine to obtain maximum use of such weapons, or to manage attacks in ways that result in effective tactical outcomes and conflict termination. Many states are acquiring long-range missiles and weapons of mass destruction with very limited exercise and test and evaluation capabilities. This does not deny them the ability to target large populated areas, economic centers, and fixed military targets, potentially inflicting massive damage. At the same time, it does present problems in more sophisticated military operations. Many will have to improvise deployments, doctrine, and war fighting capabilities. In many cases, weaknesses and vulnerabilities will persist and they will only be able to exploit a limited amount of the potential lethality of such systems.

Looking Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan

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

Key Lessons that Current and Potential Adversaries Have Learned from Recent Conflicts

All of these points take on a special importance in the light of how the current and potential opponents of the US, the West, and moderate Middle Eastern states view the Afghan conflict and Iraq War. It seems likely that the most important single lesson that both hostile and non-hostile Middle Eastern states have learned from the These conflicts – and the overall pattern of US involvement in Post Cold War conflict -- is to avoid conventional conflict with the US. Moreover, 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 in 1990. Arguably, it is also a lesson every regional state has had reason to learn by watching Israel's performance in 1967, 1973, and 1982.

Reinforcing the Lessons of the Past

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, however, two important corollaries to this lesson:

- 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 current and potential opponents a far less advantageous set of lessons in regard to its capabilities for other forms of conflict, and lessons that inevitably apply to other Western states and moderate and friendly regional powers. The US 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 that attempt to "mirror image" its military strengths. They can still kill, and sometimes quite effectively. Such regional opponents, however, cannot win; they simply cannot transform their military forces effectively enough, or afford the technology involved.

What the US, other Western states, and moderate Middle Eastern states do need to worry about, however, is . opponents who learn from the whole mix of regional conflicts – including political and ideological struggles – and then attempt to exploit the very real combination of political and military weaknesses in even the best conventional military forces.

Ideology and religion are now combining with asymmetric warfare. 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 shown that they can 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.

Iraq and Afghanistan have shown that even the world's most powerful conventional military force has serious limits, particularly if it ignore the need for grand strategy; cannot link other elements of struggle to the military dimension; and does not take account of the need for effective stability operations and nation building. These are not new lessons; the US faced them in Vietnam, Lebanon, and Somalia.

They are, however, taking on a new intensity in the Middle East and Islamic world. 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.

Lessons of Hostile States and Movements Have Learned from Current Conflicts

Any effort to speculate on the behavior of Middle Eastern states, Islamic extremists, and hostile movements even through the mid-term involves a high level of uncertainty. There are some 22-26 countries in the Middle East, depending on who is defining the region. These stated are all very different. Several will probably experience major political upheavals, and or face new wars of their own in the coming years. At the same time, many of the ideological and religious currents in the region are equally divided.

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.

Yet, in spite of these uncertainties, it already seems possible to describe some of the lessons that hostile states and movements s to have learned from recent and ongoing conflicts, particularly from 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 just becoming the ability to act upon them with 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 little debate over the fact that changes in tactics and technology are moving slowly, and that their implement is often erratic and unpredictable.

Factors Driving the Pace of Military Modernization

At the same time, many of the changes taking place in regional conventional forces are driven by other factors:

- Internal security is often becoming more important than developing effective conventional forces. Many regional powers 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.

- 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)	1987-1990	1991-1994	1995-1998	1999-2002	2000-2003
Arms Deliveries	79.4	47.1	30.8	35.7	51.4
New Arms Orders	93.3	58.7	63.9	46.6	47.3

Source: Richard F. Grimmett.

- **Resource problems are compounded by the fact that many countries now have long backlogs of arms 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 which have posed some of the most destabilizing threats in the past suffer from 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)	1987-1990	1991-1994	1995-1998	1999-2002	2000-2003
Iran					
Arms Deliveries	7,800	3,900	2,100	700	2,000
New Arms Orders	10,200	2,700	1,700	1,000	1,700
Iraq					
Arms Deliveries	16,500	*	*	*	*
New Arms Orders	10,500	*	*	200	*

<u>Libya</u>

Arms Deliveries	2,900	500	100	300	400
New Arms Orders	3,500	200	200	800	500

<u>Syria</u>

Arms Deliveries	5,200	1,400	400	400	500
New Arms Orders	5,600	900	500	300	500

Note: * = less than $50 million.
Source: Richard F. Grimmett.

- **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.

The Iranian Case Study

Iraq and Libya no longer pose growing near or mid-term potential conventional threats. The remaining potential threat countries – Iran and Syria – differ sharply in their response to the forces outlined in this paper. It is clear, however, that Iran has done a much better job of learning from recent US, British, and Israeli experience than Syria. 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 invested in the kind of conventional force modernization that will allow it react to many of the lessons it learned during the Iran-Iraq War, much less later conflicts. This is partly a matter of choice, but it is also a matter of resources. 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 since 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 suited 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 far 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 C^{4}I 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.

Hostile States and Asymmetric Warfare

The efforts hostile states are making to find asymmetric alternatives to direct military confrontation with the US and advanced conventional military powers have important antecedants.

At least part of the current 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.

Regional powers 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

At the same time, the Afghan Conflict and the Iraq War have both highlighted long standing vulnerabilities in US, Western, and moderate regional conventional forces exposed new vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities do apply differently to different Western and moderate regional powers, but they may be summarized as follows:

- **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 C^4I/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, kidnapping, executions, and terrorism:** Like low-intensity warfare, hostage-taking, kidnapping, executions, 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 struggles like the Western intervention in Bosnia and Kosovo, peacemaking efforts in Lebanon, nation building in Somalia, and the Afghan and Iraq conflicts have

made all hostile and potentially hostile states focus more seriously on such vulnerabilities. In fact, they have often made them the only options that offer a credible hope of deterrence or victory, particularly if they can be used in ways that do not lead the US to attack a large hostile state with large scale military forces.

It is important to note, however, that it is difficult for hostile states to exploit any given mix of Western and regional 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 hostile states will avoid force. It can also be 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 than hostile states in exploiting asymmetric warfare and vulnerabilities of states that rely on conventional forces. The Afghan and Iraq conflict have already shown that insurgents and terrorist groups can hide and disperse in ways that national forces cannot, and that some 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 also 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. The same, however, is true of other types of non-state actors. The most immediate examples are movements like the Hezbollah, PIJ, Hamas, and secular or tribal groups in Lebanon, Palestine, and Somalia.

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 wide range of conflicts and not just those involving 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. There are many cases where
as a result, there are many cases where Islamist extremist and other hostile movements can adapt old tactics in fighting with the US and its allies.

The US often confuses history with innovation, 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:

- **Attack the structures of governance and security by ideological, political, and violent means**: Use ideological and political means to attack the legitimacy of the government and nation building process. Intimidate and subvert the military and security forces. Intimidate and attack government officials and institutions at the national, regional, and local levels. Strike at infrastructure, utilities, and services in ways that appear to show the government cannot provide essential economic services or personal security.

- **Create alliances of convenience and informal networks with other groups to attack the US, moderate regional governments, or efforts at nationa building**. The informal common fronts operate on the principal that the "enemy of my enemy" is my temporary friend. At the same time, movements "franchise" to create individual cells and independent units, creating diverse mixes of enemies that are difficult to attack.

- **Link asymmetric warfare to crime and looting; exploit poverty and economic desperation.** Use criminals to support attacks on infrastructure and nation building activity; raise funds, and undermine security. Exploit unemployment to strengthen dedicated insurgent and terrorist cells. Blur the lines between threat forces, criminal elements, and part time forces.

- **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 Regional, Western, and other 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 and other foreigners as proxies**: There is nothing new about using Americans and other foreigners 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, aid personnel, and foreign contractor 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, or carry out executions and beheadings, 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, or incident, 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 and/or deprive local governments and nation building efforts of legitimacy. 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 an 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 it. 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, car bombs, and mass bombings:** 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.[i]

- **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**; **attack from remote locations or use timed devices:** 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, ATGMs, mortars, rockets, and timed explosives. 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 for C4IBM—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 conflicting, 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 human intelligence (HUMINT), 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 at the local tactical level, particularly in built up areas:** Learn to exploit the delays in US response efforts, and rigidities in US tactical C^4I 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 frequencies, distribution of attacks, 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 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 also 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 all the future changes in asymmetric warfare and terrorism. Rather, they portray the fact that hostile movements are adaptive, learn from experience, they find new ways to fight asymmetrically, and find new US and allied vulnerabilities over time. These lessons are 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 stages 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 military manpower and resources. Winning the war against a formal regime and conventional enemy forces 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, provided country-wide security immediately after the fall of the enemy regime, 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. As part of this, it should have provided immediate economic aid and security to the people, and made it clear that its primary goal was to create local regimes that were seen as legitimate in local eyes rather than by US and outside standards.

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 to 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?

Key Analytic Issues Affecting Any Assessment of the Lessons Being Learned by Each Side

This brief review of the duel between the US and its regional allies, and hostile regional states and movements, is already filled with complexity and uncertainty. Nevertheless, it is necessary to conclude by pointing out that there are other military and analytic issues that must be considered in assessing the trends in the military lessons to be drawn from recent wars in this region:

- **Arms control and the Arab-Israeli peace process are, and will remain, an extension of war by other means**: arms control and peace are both valid ends in themselves, but they are also security struggles and extensions of war by other means. Their impact on regional scenarios, military planning, and war fighting capability is as meaningful as manpower numbers or equipment modernization.

- **Military resource problems do not bring stability**: The recapitalization problem does create an incentive for some forms of force reduction, but reductions eliminating older and lower-quality forces will have little impact on warfighting capability. Recapitalization is also an incentive to proliferate. Moreover, most countries have historically spent twice their present percentages of GNP on military forces. Middle East states have tremendous "surge" capability to make major, unpredictable new equipment purchases.

- **Proliferation is far more complex than nuclear proliferation or the acquisition of long-range missiles**: Proliferation cannot be seen in terms of one type of weapon — i.e. nuclear. In fact, the inability to acquire nuclear weapons creates an incentive to acquire biological and chemical weapons. Delivery systems for proliferation are not ballistic missile driven: They may involve terrorism, unconventional, and proxy systems as well as cruise missiles and aircraft.

- **The number and type of major weapons platforms is increasingly less important than associated equipment like**: C4I (Command, Control, Communications, and Computers/Intelligence/Battle management/Strategic reconnaissance-Targeting/Battle Damage Assessment) can now greatly enhance the capabilities of conventional forces, and .smart munitions and highly lethal warheads can compensate for force numbers. The resulting changes in warfare require new methods of reporting on modernization, and assessing its impact, that existing unclassified reporting does not support. Reporting still focuses on major weapons platforms by basic type. Existing sources do not report accurately or in depth on platform upgrades, developments in net-centric warfare, or the acquisition of precision weapons and the systems necessary to use them.

- **New measures are needed of manpower and training quality**: Total active and reserve manpower are uncertain measures of military capability at best. Estimates of the balance need to consider ratios of officers and NCOs to enlisted men, numbers of technicians, training cycles, dependence on conscripts, retention rates, numbers of combat experience personnel, and other critical factors relating to manpower quality. Such data are rarely, if ever, available in unclassified form.

- **New measures are needed of readiness and sustainability**: Support and sustainability are critical in determining war fighting; and have high technology, infrastructure, and training dimension. Existing sources do not reporting meaningful on support equipment, supply and stock levels, combat engineering capability, repair and recovery capability, logistic structures and capability, deadline line rates or operational availability, or any of the other measures of this aspect of warfighting capability.

- **Paramilitary, counterterrorism, and asymmetric warfare capabilities need separate reporting and assessment**: Limited data is available on paramilitary and special forces, largely in the form of manpower totals or reporting on special forces and other light units with special value in asymmetric warfare. Such reporting does little to describe the real-world capabilities of the forces involved, however, and they are grossly inadequate as a means of assessing capabilities for counterterrorism and asymmetric warfare.

It is valid to argue that none of these issues are new. There have long been similar problems in assessing the military balance in the Middle East and North Africa, as in other regions. This last decade has seen a steady rise in the importance of such factors, however, and conflicts like the Gulf War of 1991 have been followed by wars like the Kosovo conflict, Israeli-Palestinian War, Afghan War, and Iraq War which have all demonstrated both the importance of the revolution in military affairs and of asymmetric warfare. Unfortunately, many of these developments simply cannot be assessed without far better data on the qualitative aspects of the military balance than is currently available.

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