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“Military Response to Fourth Generation Warfare in Afghanistan”

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At this writing, the American military response to 11 September has been confined to the war in Afghanistan. It may be too early to look at “lessons learned”, but it is not too early for an assessment of whether or not we have been successful fighting Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) as operations unfold in Afghanistan against the Taliban or Al Qaeda. Further, it is not too early to adjust our tactics, techniques, and even the “American Way of War” to combat an illusive, determined, and deadly enemy that operates outside the framework of the nation-state.

While our foes are adapting their ways of war, operating outside the nation-state paradigm, we largely operate as a second generation military trying to fight fourth generation adversaries. We have yet to transition the American military from second generation warfare to third generation warfare – even though both the Army and the Marine Corps dallied with maneuver warfare concepts in the 1980s before relapsing into the more comfortable attrition-style warfare.^[1] The immediate challenge we face is reviving our third generation maneuver warfare efforts to accommodate the challenges in combating 4GW.

This essay will re-acquaint readers with the early warnings about 4GW; examine the meaning of 4GW after 11 September; outline successful military tactics and shortcomings in combating 4GW; and provide an early report card on how well we are doing tactically and operationally in Afghanistan. What we will not attempt is to provide “school solutions” or checklist formulae for defeating 4GW opponents...there are none.

It is important here to caveat that we still do not have definitive factual information on what has transpired in Afghanistan. Thus far, we have had to rely on press reports (usually unreliable and very Western in interpretation of what happened), Pentagon briefings (not totally unbiased), and some anecdotal reports from allied warriors. We have very few data points from the Taliban or Al Qaeda.

We know the threat is global. There are many hundreds of terrorist groups and other formidable enemies that have learned by the events of 11 September how to strike at the nation-state framework and its peoples at very little cost. They will attempt to re-apply these lessons in ways not yet imagined against established nations – and not just the United States.^[2] The objective of the practitioners of 4GW is to create fear, chaos, and collapse the targeted society from within. The threat exists from the tip of Latin America to the far reaches of Siberia.

Al Qaeda is just one such terrorist group that is practicing 4GW. It is clear that within Al Qaeda, there are worldwide-compartmentalized cells. This massive but loosely connected network contains financial, political, propaganda, sleeper and assault cells as well as nonwestern constructs that we little understand. Al Qaeda has sympathizers throughout the Islamic world. Other terrorist groups may not be so well organized, but using the communist techniques of united fronts, they can create effective networks, such as the Maoist Shining Path guerrillas of Peru linked to the drug cartels of Columbia.

Another example is piracy, which could be called maritime terrorism, even though pirates and terrorists stem from different motives. According to Retired Naval Captain William Carpenter, pirates act out of greed while terrorists are out to make a political point. Today, there is a need today to bring together the

problems of reporting, analyzing, and devising methods of response. The old definition of piracy that describes piracy as acts committed on the high seas needs to be broadened to include incidents in territorial waters or in port.^[3]

Time is not on our side. Two developments change the equation. The acquisition of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) by such terrorist groups and/or their sponsor states coupled with the introduction of large numbers of young people willing to become suicide bombers are ample demonstration that we are in a new kind of war with little time to dally. Dirty nuclear bombs, chemical weapons, and biological agents are not difficult to make once the critical materials are obtained, and the technology for making such weapons is spreading at the speed of light over the internet. Transportation and deployment of such weapons is easily done.

Small dispersed independent action groups of suicide bombers (to include women and children) supported by social groups and sponsored by patrons can and will alter the balance of power, as we know it. Such groups can easily attack soft targets like trade centers, hospitals, day care centers, amusement parks, food courts, transportation systems, communication systems, media events, sports events, concerts, public offices, peaceful street demonstrations, airport passenger lines, etc. We have been on the receiving end of these attacks in the past: The Marine Barracks in Lebanon, the Kohbar Towers in Saudi Arabia, and the USS Cole in Yemen, but it was the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September that alarmed America. Israel has been on the receiving end of these attacks for several years but more frequently in the recent past. The apparent success of 4GW on the United States and Israel has encouraged more volunteer suicide bombers and renewed efforts to acquire WMD.

Pre-emptive strikes against terrorists are among the new realities and one of the operational necessities of the 21st Century. Also apparent is the realization that urban operations, crime, terrorism, and fourth generation warfare are now part of the same operational environment. We see emerging and mutating forms of violence, conflict, and warfare. The blurring of crime, peace, and war, the decline of the nation-state, and increasingly lethal terrorism embody this volatile hurly burly brew.

Fourth generation warfare is manifesting itself in highly compartmentalized, cellular, predatory networks operating outside the framework of nation-states. How do we counter and win against a formless foe? In fact, how do we know when we have won? These and other questions remain unanswered. We simply do not know at this point. The scope of this paper is limited to the military operations and tactics in Afghanistan, but in order to evaluate the performance there, we must understand the larger strategy, which is inseparable from the operations and tactics being employed.

Just what is Fourth Generation Warfare?

Few are familiar with the meaning of 4GW. Some within the military forces are slightly familiar with the term but need clarification. A more defined audience is very familiar with the concept of 4th Generation Warfare. These are the military reformers who have asked the question: "What does the future hold for war in the 21st Century, and how does it affect the American military forces?"

In the 1980s, John Boyd, a retired USAF Colonel, and William S. Lind, a former Senate staffer, introduced a number of rather provocative new ideas into formal military thinking in the United States. Some of Boyd's ideas are still around in bastardized form such as the "OODA Loop".^[4] Lind's small pamphlet on maneuver warfare is considered a classic.^[5] Some reforms caught on for a limited time,

such as the need for maneuver warfare as opposed to attrition warfare. Oddly enough, the Air Force, Boyd's parent Service, never took a second look at the crusty old airman's ideas.

The Army used some ideas in the 1982 version of Air Land Battle Doctrine (FM 100-5), but it was the Marine Corps, which subscribed more fully to the concepts and ideas of maneuver doctrine and thinking. Lind had much to do with the education of the Marine Corps, and much of the debate about the future of warfare took place in the *Marine Corps Gazette*, and in the classrooms of the Marine schoolhouses. By the turn of the century, however, the candlelight flickered and seemed to have gone out, both in the Army and the Marine Corps. The events of 11 September re-ignited that flame with a vengeance.

So what is meant by generational warfare, and what are its characteristics?

Writing in the *Marine Corps Gazette* in October 1989, Lind, Colonel Keith Nightengale (USA), Captain John F. Schmitt (USMC), Colonel Joseph W. Sutton (USA), and Lieutenant Colonel Gary I. Wilson (USMCR), addressed: "The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation."⁶ In this initial article, the authors posed the question: "What will future war look like?" In order to establish what war might look like in the future, the authors chose to define what the characteristics of war were in the recent past. They looked at significant events in recent military history that impacted on how wars are fought. In a nutshell, they perceived three main generations of warfare and a coming fourth generation.

In order to conserve effort, space, and time, we have chosen to provide a precis as a basis of discussion to the events of 11 September. Readers are encouraged to visit the d-n-i.net website and re-read all the various articles on Fourth Generation Warfare.

First generation warfare was reflective of tactics and technology in the time of the smoothbore musket and Napoleon. The tactics were of line, column, and mass armies. According to the authors, vestiges of the first generation of warfare exist today in the desire for linearity and rigid adherence to drill and ceremonies. The battle lines at Gettysburg are reminiscent of first generation warfare with straight lines and mass charges into the mouths of cannons.

It is significant that those civilizations that did not adhere to this generational change in warfare were quickly subdued, and in many cases colonized. European states took advantage of this newer form of warfare to subdue much larger countries such as India.

Second generation warfare, as defined by the authors and condensed here, was in response to the technological improvements in firepower and communications, particularly the railroad. It was based on fire and movement, but the essence was still attrition warfare, i.e., heavy applications firepower. The authors were of the opinion that second generation warfare is "...still practiced by most American units in the field." Tactically, World War I, as practiced by the French and British, and Vietnam, as practiced by the Americans, were second generation warfare.

Third generation warfare was also seen as a response to the increasing firepower on the battlefield. The difference, however, was the emphasis on maneuver and non-linear warfare. In other words, in addition to the improved technology, the third generation of warfare was based more on ideas rather than the technology. The German Blitzkrieg and later Russian operations in World War II were seen as breakthrough strategies to defeat the more heavily armed industrialized armies of the world.

From these characterizations, the authors posed the hypothesis of Fourth Generation Warfare. This style of warfare was based on the trends identified in the earlier generational shifts. They believe that future

war would be characterized by: very small independent action forces (SIAF) or cells acting on mission-type orders; a decreased dependence on logistics support; more emphasis on maneuver; and psychological goals rather than physical ones. This latter objective of psychological warfare meant that the enemy's will to fight had to collapse from within.

The authors posed that the "idea-based fourth generation may be visible in terrorism". They *did not* propose that terrorism was the fourth generation, but rather, they suggested that terrorism would take advantage of fourth generation warfare.

Finally, the authors identified three basic constructs of 4GW:

- (1) the loss of the nation state's monopoly on war,
- (2) a return to a world of cultures and states in conflict, and
- (3) internal segmentation/division along ethnic, religious, and special interests lines within our own society.

In a set of chilling predictions, the authors suggested that in fourth generation warfare:

- (1) There will be a shift in focus from the enemy's front to his rear;
- (2) The practitioners of 4GW would seek to use the enemy's strength against him;
- (3) They would use freedom's openness against itself; and finally,
- (4) The 4GW force would not need a lot of money to wage fourth generation warfare.^[7]

All of this was posed in their groundbreaking article in 1989. In retrospect, we should have paid a great deal more attention to this article than we did then or since.

There were follow-up articles, principally using the *Marine Corps Gazette* as a forum such as "The Evolution of War: The Fourth Generation"^[8] and "Fourth Generation Warfare: Another Look,"^[9]. Both the American profession of arms and the public also largely ignored these articles. Unfortunately, as we have subsequently learned, the predictions of Fourth Generation Warfare were right on the mark.

In a recent article that originally appeared in *Defense Week*, Harold Gould and Franklin Spinney wrote "Fourth-Generation Warfare Is Here."^[10] The authors pointed out that the terrorists were able to blur the distinction between war and peace and eliminate the distinction between civilian and military. Abbreviating the term Fourth Generation Warfare to "4GW", they called for a retaliation that was a reasoned and coordinated approach to take away the *casus belli* as well as eliminating the threat. Gould and Spinney suggested that the United States, and the entire world order, are now in a "new era" of warfare; and this era of 4GW, just like rock'n roll, is here to stay.

Small groups using mission type orders carried out the attacks on 11 September. It is rumored that only a few of the attackers really knew the extent of the mission. There was very little dependence on any support from Al Qaeda other than small sums of money. The FBI estimated that the attacks on 11 September cost approximately \$500,000.^[11] The emphasis of the attackers was to maneuver against the basic icons of American society: The World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and most likely either the White House or the U.S. Capitol. And as we now know from the lips of Usama Bin Laden, the goal was to collapse American society from within.

The dire predictions that many dismissed over a decade ago as irrelevant have now come to pass. We are at war with a very elusive enemy whose intent is to do cataclysmic harm to Americans and the American way of life. The question is, can we combat 4GW either using the precepts of 4GW itself or earlier generations of warfare augmented by other tools?

The Case of Afghanistan

After 11 September, the United States focused on Afghanistan, which harbored Usama Bin Laden under the Taliban regime. As a consequence of the need for action, and to pre-empt any further attacks against the United States, the American Government decided to war against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan almost from the outset. The leadership of the Al Qaeda was headquartered in Afghanistan, and the Taliban supported the Al Qaeda. Other states were known to harbor terrorists groups, but the head of the snake was seen to be in Afghanistan.

Strategy

Very early, President George W. Bush addressed the issue of the blurring of war conducted by non-state actors. He also addressed the ancillary problem of states that sponsor terrorist groups. Marshalling not only the entire resources of his Cabinet, but also Congress and the vast majority of the American public, this President understood the threat to our society and took the initial steps to deal decisively with the situation over a long term period. A new strategy for dealing with global terrorism was born.

In the past, there was no national, much less international, response to terrorist acts. By our nature, Americans are impatient. We are unaccustomed to hear from our President that anything will take a long time to accomplish. Yet in this case, the message is clear, and it has been heard. Al Qaeda awakened the “sleeping giant”.

In retrospect, the sleeping giant has gone back to sleep as far as the American public is concerned. The difference is mainly concentrated in the Government and in the initiatives of the Government of the United States. While Americans are aware of the War as brought to us nightly on TV, and of being inconvenienced by airport security requirements, there has been no great rush by young people to join the Armed Forces such as there was after Pearl Harbor. The patriotic fervor has declined as the flags have begun to fade.

The Bush Administration recognized that any response to 4GW would have to be global war, not just a military response. Bush also warned us that it would be a long war. Although it is doubtful that anyone in the Administration recognized the term 4GW, they did know and use the term “asymmetric warfare”, a term used in the Army After Next studies to suggest David and Goliath wars – depicting how vulnerable we are to unconventional attacks. The Administration also knew what had to be done to combat the enemy, and they turned on the machinery to do it. The strategy included a major intelligence gathering effort that involved many different nations and sources. The price we paid for ignoring human intelligence (HUMINT) and cultural intelligence in favor of technical intelligence (TECHINT) over the past half-century was finally recognized.

As we learned more about the attackers, some also learned just how much the terrorists conformed to the 4GW prescriptions identified earlier by Lind, et al. ^[12] There can be no mistake, the Usama Bin Laden and the Al Qaeda terrorists knew what they were doing. ^[13] Their intent was to severely damage the American economy and instill fear in the public. They made a major dent in the American economy, and that dent may leave a permanent scar on the freedoms of a democratic republic and a capitalist economy. The total damage to our freedoms and to our economy has yet to be fully assessed.

In order to avert the terrorists’ attempts to turn this from singular acts of terrorism into a religious war, the Bush Administration had to carefully isolate the terrorists. This was done by a combination of diplomacy and public policy announcements. Marine Lieutenant Colonel Hammes described this as

“netwars” in his 1994 article.

A netwar may focus on public or elite opinion, or both. It may involve public diplomacy measures, propaganda and psychological campaigns, political and cultural subversion, deception or interference with local media, infiltration of computer networks and databases, and efforts to promote dissident or opposition movements across computer networks. ^[14]

It appears that the Bush Administration borrowed from Hammes concept of netwar, but in reality, they probably never read any of the articles dealing with 4GW. A war of religions was not in the interests of the United States, and the use of diplomacy as well as domestic speeches and policy, successfully countered the attempt to turn the war into a religious war.

Part of the problem was the American public who saw only the faces of Arabs as the perpetrators of the attacks and joyous crowds of Arabs on CNN. The Administration had an education problem on its hands with regard to its own citizenry as well as the Islamic world.

The rhetoric of the Administration was announced in no uncertain terms: “You are either for us or against us!” While the Administration realized that this was irrational, they also reasoned that the message had to be sent around the globe that the most powerful nation in the world would not truck any support of terrorists by any nation-state. In addition, the United States made a powerful argument for going after the terrorists sooner rather than waiting until later when they might be able to get their hands on nuclear weapons.

This was part of an Information Warfare effort that both sides played heavily at the onset. Usama Bin Laden used videotapes, which were sent to the Al Jazeera Television network to spread his message to the Islamic world about the rationale for attacking the infidel and the need for a jihad. The tapes stopped after a few months of military action in Afghanistan, virtually giving the Americans a monopoly in the information war.

As intelligence began to pour in it was clear that Al Qaeda was not only militant, they were entrepreneurial. There was a definite terrorist banking system with cut outs and blind alleys. The most sacrosanct policies of international banking institutions regarding privacy had to be opened to inspection and tracing of accounts. This had never before been allowed, and while there was some coercion involved, the results were that at least some of the terrorist-banking network was tracked. ^[15] We continue to find traces of financial dealings and roadblocks to information, but the technique of “following the money” has had an effect.

The military response was only one part of a much larger strategic response that is still ongoing and requires daily coordination. What is normally seen on CNN and Fox News is military action or Pentagon news releases, but behind the scenes, there is considerable wartime activity that goes unnoticed. Such a coordinated effort has not occurred since World War II.

Liberal use of cash did not hurt either. The domestic economy had a cash surplus of several trillion prior to 11 September. That cash was spent in addition to borrowing against the future to repair the damage both nationally and internationally. Major airlines were shored up with liberal uses of cash. Airport security personnel were nationalized. Foreign countries were promised and given cash to support our efforts. Just how much cash was spent in this way will never be known, but it is very probable that our access to bases in countries like Pakistan and other surrounding countries was secured with cash.

Cash gained intelligence and basic information. Military operations in and around Afghanistan required

the resources necessary to conduct war. Not only did the Administration provide the cash necessary to get started, Congress allocated the cash necessary to support the continuation of the effort as requested by the Administration.

All said, the coordinated Grand Strategy, play as you go, got off to a good start. It contains all the elements to support successful military operations against a terrorist enemy on any number of fronts. Implementation, however, is proving very difficult with such an enemy. Moreover, implementation may be even more difficult with such friends as the Israelis. The situation in Palestine exacerbates the prosecution of this war against terrorism, and it may prove to be the unraveling of the American grand strategy if the Palestinian question becomes the predominant focus of the Administration. In the case of Palestine, we may be on the receiving end of Boyd's OODA loop in terms of strategy.

Operations

The theater of war is often identified as the operational level of war in current military thinking. While there are several governmental players in a theater, such as Ambassadors and Foreign Service officers, CIA agents, and a host of other agencies, the military commander is normally the warlord of the U.S. commitment. In this case, Central Command (CENTCOM) was the responsible command for Afghanistan. The headquarters of CENTCOM is in Tampa, FL, primarily because it has been impossible to find a host for the headquarters in any Middle Eastern nation.

The third division of doctrine is tactics. The term tactics normally means the conduct of battles – usually at battalion level and below in terms of force structure. Yet this war has seen a blurring of the nice divisions of war that were identified in conventional war structures and before the advent of the age of satellite communications. What the young private or sergeant does on scene can well affect strategy (or even grand strategy) at the highest level. Likewise, the President can now direct the actions of privates and sergeants if he so chooses. The media has transformed what was once the domain of generals into a nightly description of “how goes the war”. The Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have to counter potential disinformation by giving nightly briefings to the press – possibly devoting more time to public relations than to decision-making.

So the war has taken on a blurry admixture of strategy, operations, and tactics in fourth generation setting. Not unlike Vietnam, there are some very distinct parallels.

- An elusive enemy who doesn't fight “fair”
- Difficult terrain
- Uncertain allies
- Problematic identification of friend from foe
- Experienced and hardened enemy fighters
- Underground enemy
- Sanctuary (Pakistani and Iranian borders)
- Delivery Platforms: Fixed wing fighter-bombers, B-52, AC-130, and helicopters

- Application of Special Operations Forces to advise allies and conduct operations
- Use of U.S. conventional forces to secure bases and to conduct operations

Comparison with Vietnam should not be taken too far, but we have been in this situation before and have not done well. The differences may be more important than the similarities.

One of the significant differences is that so far, the US has resisted the temptation of committing large numbers of ground forces to the fight. At present there are about 6,000 U.S. forces in Afghanistan compared to a high of 550,000 in Vietnam. According to the Washington Times, General Tommy Franks is keeping the U.S. force levels low to avoid presenting lucrative targets to the Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters.^[16] Significantly, if necessary, the U.S. can easily extract 6,000 troops far easier than 600,000. A smaller operational footprint enhances strategic options.

Four Phases of the War to Date

As of this writing, April 2002, there have been what could be described as four phases to this war in Afghanistan: The initial phase of the war was a very short phase where we applied airpower alone with very little success. The second phase was the introduction of Special Operations Forces to assist the opposition (alliance) forces. Combined with the ground operations of the Northern Alliance, equipped with Russian aid and American money, our SOF were successful in dislodging the Taliban and Al Qaeda from their conventional defensive positions. The third phase was the operation in the Tora Bora Mountains where we found that SOF with the reluctant allies was not enough to both seal the Pakistani border and take the battle to the enemy in their caves. The fourth phase was Operation Anaconda where we used conventional U.S. military forces along with a smattering of our closer allied special operations teams but ultimately had to call in the local Afghani warlord to help oust the enemy from the Shah-i-Kot stronghold.^[17] Again, the enemy appears to have been able to fade across the border into Pakistan. (See Table 1.)

If examined through objective lenses, it becomes clear that the Al Qaeda forces were not fighting 4GW during the first two phases of the war. They were in conventional defensive positions. Only after they were shoved out of power were they able to fight in the way that they are the most effective: from the caves and in small groups against a conventional force.

| Phase | Characteristics | Period | Results | Generation |
|-------|---|------------------------|--|---|
| I | US air strikes based on TechInt targets and in response to Afghan requests. | 7 Oct 01 – 20 Oct 01 | Not effective in dislodging Taliban. Terrorists retained initiative. | 2GW (Attrition) |
| II | SOF and CIA on ground to advise, direct CAS, and gather intelligence. Reconnaissance Pull. Adaptive Operations. | 21 Oct 01 – 15 Dec 01 | Extremely effective in forcing Taliban and Al Qaeda into mountains. US and Allies won initiative. Rapidly cleared country. | 3GW (Maneuver) |
| III | Al Qaeda located in stronghold Tora Bora Mountains | 15 Dec 01 15 Jan 02 | Al Qaeda intimidated allied forces who “went home” after declaring victory. Al Qaeda took initiative from allies | 4GW applied by Al Qaeda |
| IV | Conventional US forces applied to knock out Al Qaeda in the caves of Shah-i-Kot (Operation Anaconda) | 16 Jan 02 - 18 Mar 02 | Not very effective – similar to Soviet/Afghan war. Al Qaeda wrested initiative. Escaped. | 2GW (Attrition) applied by U.S. Al Qaeda fought 4GW |

Table 1: Phases of the Anti-Terrorist War in Afghanistan to Date (March 2002)

By far the most interesting aspect of the war so far has been the ability of the special operations forces to operate in this environment. SOF were able to “infiltrate” their way into the Alliance Forces and create a powerful moral force; leveraging the physical with the mental and moral. These special operations teams were truly adaptive and allowed for what William Lind calls “Reconnaissance Pull”. That is, the reconnaissance elements (special operations in this case) pulling the rest of the force in the direction of least resistance to achieve a considerable victory through maneuver.^[18] Enabled to a degree never before experienced by high technology (direct communications with air platforms and precision guided munitions). While we should not minimize the contribution of the new technologies, the fact is that the difference between the ineffective Phase I and the highly effective Phase II was “boots on the ground”.

The absence of command rather than the presence of command is an interesting feature of the second phase of the war. While there were daily reports from Afghanistan, it was almost as if the high command (CENTCOM in Tampa) was waiting for the SOF teams to report in through their SOF channels before reporting to the world what was happening. The dramatic pictures of SOF soldiers in various stages of uniform disarray riding horses, donkeys, and ATVs across the high plains complete with laptops portrayed a situation where these fine teams, knowing what the commander’s intent was, exploited the seams of the Al Qaeda and Taliban wherever they could. At least, that is the way it appears to have happened from what information is available. Within days, the SOF and our newfound allies had achieved the equivalent of the German Blitzkrieg across the plains of France in World War II, albeit against a much more lightly armed enemy. The rapidity with which our SOF teams and the allied fighters did this was amazing, but it has to be said that the Taliban and the Al Qaeda were never trained or organized to fight the conventional fight.

There is a glimmer of hope that from the use of Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan, i.e., small cells made up of senior non-commissioned officers and led by seasoned leaders; supported by special air support; and aided by allies (some of which are of questionable allegiance), we might have the foundation of a force that is capable of coping with 4GW forces. Rather than committing large conventional forces which have not proved to be as effective, there is good value in investing heavily in SOF.

The battle in the hills of Tora Bora did not demonstrate that the SOF were any better than the conventional forces used in Anaconda, but the promise of a small, versus large, U.S. footprint appears to be the way to combat the enemy. More to the point, the Tora Bora and Anaconda operations both show that the SOF was equally effective as a larger U.S. force with all the command and control paraphernalia and posturing.

The question is: why do we want to commit a large conventional U.S. force to such battles? Part of the answer is in seeking what used to be called “glory”. All good commanders seek to get into the battle, whether or not they lead the best suited force. If there is a battle, then ride to the sound of the guns. But there is more than glory involved.

The Army was highly criticized when they could not provide Task Force Hawk in Albania to support the Kosovo Operation in a timely manner. Stung by the criticisms, the Army has been trying to prove its manhood ever since. The fight near Shah-i-Kot seemed like the opportunity it had been waiting for. Despite individual acts of heroism and uncommon bravery among the troops and unit leaders, it is clear that the Army was ill-prepared for combat at the higher elevations among the rocky terrain and caves and in the extreme cold.^[19]

Recently, it was revealed that Usama Bin Laden was in the Tora Bora complex but escaped. Further, it was speculated that the failure to capture or kill Bin Laden was because the U.S. did not commit conventional ground forces to seal the borders with Pakistan.^[20] While it is easy for armchair strategists to conclude that had there been forces guarding the border, Bin Laden would not have escaped, this conclusion does not track with what we know about how the enemy operates in the guerrilla mode. They have an uncanny ability to avoid contact when they want to avoid it. In that terrain and altitude, it would probably have taken several divisions to seal off the border while protecting our own rear from guerrilla attack from Pakistan. The real failure was in misreading the cultural intelligence that should have told us that our somewhat erratic allies were not up to this fight. Motivation of the friendlies should have been a top priority. One suspects that our SOF advisors knew as much and probably reported it through the chain of command. Eventually, the Afghani warlords were turned around, but by then it was too late.

U.S. military forces, Marines and Army, had been deployed to base areas in Afghanistan, but they had not been deployed into the combat areas. It was in the Shah-i-Kot valley that the American generals had their first chance to plan and execute a battle of annihilation against the mostly Al Qaeda fighters using mostly American troops. Unfortunately, it turned out that the “victory” of Operation Anaconda was more imagined than real. Too many Al Qaeda escaped the noose again to claim anything but a hollow victory for the elements of the 101st Airborne and the 10th Mountain divisions and the allied special operations forces. The Afghan allies had to be called upon once again to come in and mop up the cave complexes, and not only were the Al Qaeda fighters to ridicule the American soldiers but also, our Afghani allies were not so complimentary on their performance.^[21] It can be said that the Al Qaeda fighters successfully ambushed and successfully escaped the clutches of the Americans. Anaconda was an attempt to create a linear battlefield by Clausewitzian generals using heavy doses of attrition warfare on an elusive enemy. While we still do not know the actual results, it is clear that this battle was less than advertised. We attempted to apply 2GW against a 4GW enemy once again (similar to Vietnam), and it failed. In fact, it handed the Al Qaeda a moral victory with many escaping or staying hidden.

Instead of adapting to the enemy; instead of being flexible with regard to the response; instead of recognizing our own inherent limitations in these altitudes; our generals perceived a conventional Clausewitzian war that they could understand and fight, and our generals lost. No, they did not lose the battle. They lost the strategic initiative.

Stark in perspective as a first in Afghanistan, the Army generals took over media relations and brought back the over-optimism and “body count” of yore – playing into the hands of the elusive enemy. Our own media quickly proved the generals wrong without Al Qaeda as much as issuing a single press release. The Army is still trying to recover figurative lost ground in the media from the battle of Shah-i-Kot.

Unquestionably, the troops that fought at Shah-i-Kot were well trained, but for what kind of war? The troops, including the 10th “Mountain” Division elements may not have been acclimated for the altitude, and there may have been considerable difficulties supporting them, but there was plenty of heroism to go around for all. In one incident a SEAL, Petty Officer 1st Class Neil Roberts, fell out of a CH-47 that had been shot up. Although he was captured and murdered, he was not left on the ground. His buddies went back for him. That is the mark of a well-trained, well-led, and cohesive force. But such bravery does not mean that our military forces are prepared to fight 4GW forces.

Former leader of the Green Berets, Major General Bill Moore, U.S. Army (Retired) said recently that “One of the mistakes we don’t (*sic.*) make in Afghanistan is we don’t (*sic.*) send untrained and

unseasoned troops in there as the Soviets did.” “This goes to the very distinct advantage the U.S. military has over almost every military in the world – that is, our soldiers are effectively trained and led.”^[22] General Moore was alluding to lessons learned from Soviet mistakes. While it is true that our soldiers are well trained, and while it is true that we have not committed large numbers of untrained troops to Afghanistan as yet, what we have not proved is that we can fight 3d Generation Warfare (Maneuver Warfare), let alone 4GW. So far, only the Special Operations Forces (to include allied SOF) have proved that they can conduct maneuver warfare.

Offering Up Some Fodder for Thought

Militarily, we have not proved that we know how to fight 4GW. First we must understand it. To understand it requires study and thinking. There appears to be precious little thinking going on in the institution of the profession of arms. The war colleges are dedicated to the principle of thinking, but they appear to have produced only clones of the generals of World War I. Our response to virtually every conflict is to apply liberal use of firepower. Even the Army War College innovative study “Army After Next” resulted only in a focus on a new hardware system: the Future Combat System.

We are a 2GW military trying to fight a 4GW. Before we can begin to learn to fight a 4GW, we must first learn to fight 3d Generation Warfare (maneuver warfare). We have to revive the teaching of maneuver warfare in the schoolhouses. We have to practice maneuver warfare in the training areas. We have to conduct maneuver warfare wherever possible on the battlefield – before we can ever learn to cope with 4GW. Can we adapt? How long will it take? Who will lead?

In 4GW we have to think about how we approach this new generation of warfare. John Boyd offered some perspective on how to fight 4GW in his thoughts on Moral War.^[23] Few recognize that Boyd identified three categories of conflict: attrition warfare, maneuver conflict, and moral conflict. Most recognize the first two categories as identified by Boyd, but it is the Moral conflict that is least acknowledged. Boyd states that this is conflict as practiced by the Mongols, most guerrilla leaders, a very few counter guerrillas, and certain others from Sun Tzu and Musashi^[24], to the present.

The essence of moral conflict is extracted from Boyd’s presentation on “Patterns of Conflict” (See Figure 1). It is easy to recognize the Al Qaeda, but is it easy to recognize the response? Boyd never finished any specific prescription for Moral War, but he believed that the answer lays in adaptation: “Get inside adversary observation-orientation-decision-action loops (at all levels) by being more subtle, more indistinct, more irregular, and quicker—yet appear to be otherwise”.

At the tactical level, Boyd believed that complexity (technical, organizational, operational, etc.) causes commanders and subordinates alike to be captured by their own internal dynamics or interactions – hence they cannot adapt to rapidly changing external (or internal) circumstances. At the strategic level, maneuver/counter maneuver suggests we need a potential for a variety of possibilities:

- Rapid shifts among many simultaneous and sequential possibilities permits one to repeatedly generate mismatches between events/efforts adversary observes or imagines and those he must respond to (to survive).

- Without a variety of possibilities adversary is given the opportunity to read as well as adapt to events and efforts as they unfold.

The question arises, how are we presenting Al Qaeda with these many different threats at many different

levels? Are we thinking of fourth generation ways of “*Ai Uchi*”, cutting our foe just as he cuts us. We need special operations approaches that reflect “*Bunbu Itchi*” or “pen and sword in accord”. Perhaps we are, but it is unclear that this is the case, and it further appears that the Al Qaeda is comfortable in their holes and with their Pakistani friends. Not all actions must be military. In fact most should not be military actions if we are to understand Sun Tsu.

ESSENCE OF MORAL CONFLICT

Create, Exploit, and Magnify:

• Menace

Impressions of danger to one's well being survival.

• Uncertainty:

Impressions, or atmosphere, generated by events that appear ambiguous, contradictory, erratic, unfamiliar, chaotic, etc.

• Mistrust

Atmosphere of doubt and suspicion loosens human bonds among members of an organic whole or between org wholes.

Idea

- Surface fear, anxiety, and alienation in order to generate many non-cooperative centers of gravity thereby magnify internal

friction



AIM

Destroy moral bonds that permit

Figure 1: Boyd's Essence of Moral Conflict
an organic whole to exist.

Boots on the ground are important, but more important is having smart boots on the ground. Special operations forces are in high demand. Special Operations Forces have been training to operate in this type of environment for over 40 years; so it should come as no shock that these small teams of senior soldiers know their way around the unconventional battlefield. Their talented teams and capabilities will be able to do more in this type environment than entire divisions of conventional forces with large logistics footprints and juicy targets. U.S. Special Operations Forces come with their soft side as well. Psychological operations and civic affairs units are part of Special Operations. Intelligence operations and Special operations have traditionally worked hand in glove. This combination of capabilities at the operational and tactical levels provides a potent force with which to confront terrorism. Conventional forces will get their chances to perform against other enemies on other battlefields, but on this battlefield, they have limited utility.

This 4GW warfare has to be fought over the moral high ground. This cannot be overemphasized. It will take a combination of strategic and operational/tactical ideas and forces to achieve the high moral ground in combating terrorism or any other form of 4GW. John Boyd described several actions to be taken to achieve the moral high ground.

- Undermine guerrilla causes and destroy their cohesion by demonstrating integrity and competence of government to represent and serve needs of people – rather than exploit and impoverish them for the benefit of a greedy elite.
- Take political initiative to root out and visibly punish corruption and eliminate grievances at the grass roots.
- Infiltrate guerrilla movements and employ the population for intelligence on the guerrillas
- Deploy administrative talent, police, and roving counter-guerrilla teams into affected regions.
- Take and keep the initiative by relentless pursuit. Employ the guerrilla's own tactics of reconnaissance, infiltration, surprise hit-and-run, and sudden ambush to keep roving bands off-balance and to make base areas untenable.
- Emphasize capture and conversion to government cause -- instead of harsh anti-population reprisal measures and "body count" – as a basis to undermine guerrilla influence.
- Visibly identify central government with local political/economic/social reform in order to connect government with hopes and needs of people, thereby gain their support and confirm government legitimacy.
- Destroy guerrilla cohesion and break their hold upon the population via political initiative that demonstrates moral legitimacy and vitality of government and by relentless military operations that emphasize stealth/fast tempo/fluidity-of-action and cohesion of overall effort.^[25]

Boyd did not perceive the type of global war now facing us, including terrorists who are willing to sacrifice their own lives to take the war to the enemy. Even so, there is little doubt that he would stand by his prescriptions to fight the moral war, just as he had outlined, to create the mismatches essential to defeating the enemy.

The Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Air Force General Richard B. Myers, is of the belief that this current war against global terrorism resembles that of World War II in at least one significant way. He recently told Congress: “During World War II, the services showed a remarkable capacity to learn from the experience. At the beginning of the war, they faced conditions they had not prepared for, but managed to adapt themselves in the midst of the fight, and within a short time had established an extraordinary degree of teamwork and combat efficiency. We face a similar task today—to defeat multiple enemies who are capable of striking us with asymmetric means from locations around the world. Winning this new global war will require us to exhibit the same flexibility in adapting to changing conditions.”^[26]

General Myers is right with regard to the need for “adaptation” in handling the mismatches presented by the enemy and creating our own mismatches over the enemy. We might even use the term “transformation”. We cannot afford a one-dimensional or two-dimensional fighting force. “Transformation” must not be restricted to a single event where some tinkering is done with organizations or policy. Transformation and adaptation must be the hallmark of any capability to provide for the national defense, and particularly to fight 4GW, and it begins with thinking organizations. Our military forces must be able to transform to the environment in order to survive and in order to win. That also means transforming how we think about fighting and how we fight. Combating 4GW is quite different from combating 2GW. The Al Qaeda can elect to attack the U.S. using 4GW, but the dilemma confronting us is that U.S. military must be able to fight and win in all forms of warfare.

As any American military officer will tell you, the great strength of the U.S. Armed Forces lies not in her generals but rather in her strong non-commissioned officer corps. These fine thinking and acting NCOs have an unspoken but God-given mission to train their troops and even their own second lieutenants despite the training schedules and despite the orders issued from on high, not because of them. There is little doubt why the basic training camps are dominated by the NCO drill instructors. They know how to train. Training is the secret to success on the battlefield. As Douglas MacArthur said: “On the fields of friendly strife are sown the seeds that on other days and on other fields will bear the fruits of victory.” MacArthur was talking about team sports, but the essence of sports is taught by the coach, and the coach in military terms is the nearest sergeant.

Vietnam saw the introduction of the “instant NCO” which appalled the officer corps. As a result, many of the responsibilities and authority of the NCOs were taken over by the officer corps. While the responsibilities have been given back in some areas, the authority was lost forever. Nevertheless, the NCO corps has been reborn and has assumed leadership where it is absent and even where it is not. Much of the micro-management extant in the mid-grade and senior grade officers may be traced back to the Vietnam War. Maybe we have forgotten how to cut our subordinates loose to do their job.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff needs to institutionalize the adaptability of which he speaks.

Some Conclusions

There have been some serious efforts by the Administration to confront this war on a scale that it demands. The seriousness with which the President addresses the issue is evident in the resources that

he is committing to this war. There is still more that has to be done to effectively address the issues. We have to convince the terrorists and their families and their leaders that terrorism is morally wrong, not something to be celebrated. This is a challenge to any political leader as it addresses religious, societal, economic, and political differences. But it is a challenge, which we must accept and counter if we are to win.

What is winning, and when will we know that we have won? It is doubtful if anyone knows the answer to this pertinent question. Moreover, the question is presumptuous. We may not win especially if we persist in seeing things solely from a western perspective. The threat is considerable, and few Americans recognize the extent of the threat. It will take much more than Active and Reserve, Marines, Airmen, Soldiers, and Coast Guard to win this one, however.

Our military forces so far have mixed results in trying to cope with 4GW. We have the potential of dealing with 4GW by learning from the Special Operations Forces and their experiences and applying them in new ways based on people and ideas, not addiction to technological hardware. We will fail if we insist in using traditional 2GW military responses with conventional forces where they are inappropriate.

Can we fight 4GW and win? The jury is still out. We have had some success on the ground in Afghanistan, but the recent employment of conventional forces in Operation Anaconda is regression to a failing concept. No matter how many Predator Unmanned Air Vehicles (UAV) armed with Hellfire missiles, no matter how many satellite photos, and no matter how many signals intercepts, this war, like all others, will be won or lost by ideas.

It is not too early to adjust our tactics, techniques, operational thinking or even the “American Way of War” to combat an elusive, determined, and deadly enemy that operates outside the framework of the nation-state in a fourth generation milieu. We must approach today’s fourth generation thorns with better ideas and Masashi’s spirit of *shin-ken sho-bu*...to be done in deadly earnest. ^[27]

Retired MG Bill Moore makes the point that our soldiers (especially our Special Operations Forces) at the tactical levels have been trained to adapt, take independent action, and handle the mismatches. This seems to be more true of our Special Operations Forces than of our conventional force. Low-level independent action by semi-autonomous forces is one part of the answer as to how to fight Al Qaeda (and other 4GW fighters) on their home turf. The real answer is in how our leaders think, and we are far from any acceptance of either maneuver warfare or 4GW within the U.S. military hierarchy.

Another clue may be found in Boyd’s moral war approach. We have to constantly generate our own mismatches over the enemy. Rather than micro-management from above, the answer may be a bottoms-up approach. The thought that the CENTCOM Headquarters remains in Tampa – out of the theater – tends to reinforce a concept of small trusted units that carry a big stick in fighting 4GW.

Clearly, the SOF have a better idea! Can the rest of the U.S. military establishment learn from them in time?

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