

Abstract

Following the events of September 11, 2001, the United States was forced to re-evaluate military strategy. Traditionally, the US posture has been to be well armed as a deterrent. In the last ten years, the strategy has shifted to a posture of policing and response to global conflict. Currently, the US military faces a challenge of transformation. To fight organizations like al Qaeda, the military, especially the Army, must become more like it in strategy and structure. Additionally, there must be a method to measure the effectiveness of the strategy implementations.

In recent years, the major strategies being utilized by the United States military have changed. During the cold war following World War II, the United States government favored a strategy of massive and superior arms to promote a deterrent to hostile actions from abroad. During the last ten years, the US military, mainly the Army, has become more involved in global peacekeeping activities. The posture has shifted from one of purely defense to one of proaction. A situation develops, the US military intervenes—fast. The military is trained for a rapid response to global conflicts. The motto of the Navy is “anytime, anywhere.” The military has improved response time as part of their overall strategy. The idea is to deal with the situation before it has a chance to escalate. The rapid response ability of the military was displayed following the terrorist actions taken on September 11, 2001. The US quickly deployed forces in retaliation. By applying the huge US military resource to support developing democracies world wide, the federal government hopes to influence political, economic and social structure.

Does the attack referred to as 911 mean that the US intelligence community failed, military might is no longer a deterrent, or both? Regardless of the reasons, the US government realizes that their military strategies must change again to meet the latest challenges to America’s place in the world. The federal government has decided that the military must undergo a transformation to best carry out the strategies for policing, fast response and now anti-terrorism. In part, the transformation serves to keep in step with the environment in which the military now operates. Organizations have tended to reduce hierarchical levels and empower employees with greater decision-making responsibilities. Meanwhile, the American military branches have remained as rigid hierarchies with tall command structures.

Another reason for the effort to change is related to effectiveness. To fight terrorists, the military must become familiar with terrorist strategies and devise ways to defuse them. The

organization held responsible for 911, al Qaeda, for example, operates as a network of cells. The major factors holding the cells together are religion and culture. The members of al Qaeda share religious beliefs and ethnic heritage. The military has a large social challenge since US citizens do not carry the same level of bonding as al Qaeda personnel. The bonding characteristics carry over into the ranks of the military, composed mainly of US natives. To counter the disadvantage in the social area, the US military can exploit its narrative advantage. The message from al Qaeda has its main appeal within Islamic countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan. The US, with access to a larger segment of the world's population, has appealed to global citizens with the message that al Qaeda's actions threaten everyone, not just residents of North America. Military analysts have compared the US message with the posture assumed after the Pearl Harbor attack. Still, al Qaeda has more experience operating as a warfare network than the US military.

Perhaps the most major change that the military has to bear will be its structure. If one considers that each cell has a leader, forming a hub in the warfare network, and that each cell is nimble, able to operate in concert with the others in swarming strikes, then the current military hierarchies must fall. Military structure needs to take on a format that more widely distributes command and control authority and networks intelligence. The al Qaeda cells, for example, coordinated attacks using encrypted e-mail messages. Using public communication networks in a stealthy fashion somewhat negates the technological advantage carried by the US military. In an attempt to create better synergy between segments of the government involved in national security, the department of Homeland Security has been proposed. The new department will merge currently disparate sections of government, and the Coast Guard, into a single group. The hope is that by pooling and sharing information, the overall effectiveness of the new department

will be greater than the total of the separate entities. The military, in turn, would benefit from forming small squads of troops, linked into to a common database of the latest intel.

As with all strategies, the US government desires an evaluation of performance. A good method of evaluation in the case of fighting terror might seem to be to benchmark the rate of capture of cell members against the amount of terrorist activity. However, due to the architecture of al Qaeda, it is difficult to identify its members for capture. Because of the social and religious bonds, the chances of infiltration are small. The authorities have managed to intervene in some terrorist plots before they could be executed. Unfortunately, there is no reliable basis to judge the size and intent of the enemy network. Thus, the known activities could be a tiny percentage of total operations underway. To increase the chances of isolating terrorist cells like those operating as al Qaeda, the US government has lobbied for changes in the laws governing surveillance of communications. There is an information strategy component to the new vision for the military. Information is not only useful, it can be used as a weapon when delivered as misinformation or propaganda. With easier and faster access to suspicious transmissions, the military could interrupt more campaigns, eventually killing the network by overwhelming the cells. Therein lies a paradox: To preserve our freedoms, does US society need to become less open?

Another benchmarking approach could involve assessing the damage caused by removing external resources preferred by the warfare network. Increasing effort is being expended on restricting the flow of cash to al Qaeda. The backgrounds of all flight school attendees will be thoroughly examined from now on. Terrorists wishing to gain flight instruction will have a rough experience nowadays. By diminishing the pool of external resources necessary to the network, the organization becomes vulnerable because now it must solicit services from unfamiliar sources. The risk of a breach of loyalty is much higher.

Significant leaders form the hubs of the cells. As major members of al Qaeda have been captured, the hopes of locating Osama bin Laden himself have grown. The impact of capturing Osama bin Laden is controversial. Some feel that al Qaeda would crumble without bin Laden's direct leadership. Precedent seems otherwise. After Professor Abimael Guzman, the founder of Peruvian terrorist organization Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) was captured the cells continued to operate. Again, information needed to estimate the size of al Qaeda is limited. Setting a benchmark of number of cell leaders apprehended is difficult to substantiate.

The best benchmark in the war on terrorism seems to be the extent of reconnaissance on the hostile network. The best information available has come from captured al Qaeda operatives whose loyalties were swayed by Muslim clerics assisting the US. The amount of quality intelligence is small and ages quickly. If the military can act upon the data swiftly, it can overtake al Qaeda's momentum. It is to the military's advantage to form combat 'cells' of its own to take advantage of the very qualities that have given warfare networks like al Qaeda their early advantage.

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