



(Associated Press photo)

Demonstrators chant pro-Islamic State slogans as they wave the group's flags 16 June 2014 in front of the provincial government headquarters in Mosul, Iraq.

The Future of Warfare against Islamic Jihadism

Engaging and Defeating Nonstate, Nonuniformed, Unlawful Enemy Combatants

Lt. Col. Allen B. West, U.S. Army, Retired

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.

-Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

I remember the mandatory reading list I had as a newly commissioned Army field artillery second lieutenant. Two books on it stood out: Erwin Rommel's *Infantry Attacks* and Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*. Later, as a young captain flying from Fort Riley, Kansas, to the Middle East for Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, I reread *The Art of War*. The quote above from that book is one of my favorite quotes (along with the quote sometimes attributed to Alexander the Great, "fortune favors the bold").

The current conflagration in which our nation—actually the world—finds itself in, contending with the issue of Islamic jihadism, makes Sun Tzu's quote seem quite applicable. When we fail to recognize the global Islamic jihadist movement, we lack the ability to understand the history, goals, and objectives of this enemy who consistently articulates its designs, only to be discarded or dismissed by U.S. leadership. Though some feel that identifying the enemy is unnecessary, failing to do so

puts us at a clear disadvantage in achieving victory, as Sun Tzu would postulate. Even the moniker "war on terror" is a horrible misnomer. A nation cannot fight a tactic, which is what terror is—a means to an end. It would be the same as if we referred to World War II as the "war on the blitzkrieg" or the "battle against the kamikaze."

Currently, the world is focused on the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). But, how does the United States face this unlawful enemy combatant on today's battlefield? The United States and its Western allies should consider ISIS their greatest threat. However, we should not discount the threat posed by other groups such as Boko Haram and al-Qaida. Let us use the quote of Sun Tzu to present a policy direction and solution to engage and defeat not just ISIS, but the global Islamic jihad.

Strategic Imperatives

In order to defeat ISIS and the global Islamic jihad movement, the United States must follow strategic

imperatives which, at this time, it lacks. These imperatives are not simply tactical level tasks conducted in a strategic venue; words like degrade, defeat, and destroy have very different definitions to a tactical- or operational-level military planner.

U.S. leadership must understand that the intent of ISIS is to control territory in order to create their own nation. Unfortunately, we are repeating the terrible mistake we made in Afghanistan when we allowed the Taliban to come to power and hold territory. Their local movement allied with the global intentions of al-Qaida and Osama bin Laden. The result was not just the establishment of a savage, barbaric seventh-century state but also the exportation of a vile ideology that espouses terrorist activities.

Deny the enemy sanctuary. The first strategic imperative the United States must follow to defeat our enemy is to deny them sanctuary. This simply means that we must commit to enemy-oriented rather than terrain-oriented operations. The



(Photo courtesy of the U.S. Air Force National Museum)

The U.S. Air Force bombs key points and bridges on the Ho Chi Minh Trail during Operation Tiger Hound, circa 1965. The North Vietnamese used the trail to move troops and supplies into the South. Failure by the United States and South Vietnam to successfully interdict this critical line of communication and deny the North Vietnamese the sanctuary it provided ultimately contributed to the success of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces.

message we must send to the enemy is that we will not be deterred from engaging them if they seek respite within another nation's borders. Our greatest advantage is our strategic mobility; we must use it to take the fight to the enemy, which does not respect borders and boundaries. We must attack Islamic jihadist forces in their base of operations.

We have failed to this point by focusing on nation building without simultaneously conducting strike operations. Consider the early days of Operation Enduring Freedom when our forces, combined with those of the Northern Alliance, were able to dislodge a sixty thousand-man Taliban army from Afghanistan.¹ We must not become burdened down with nation-building tasks when we have not completely denied the enemy a base of operations—allowing them to relocate.

Also, let's be honest: drones are an asset but not a strategic panacea, and they are certainly not a strategy. Drones are a tool that should be employed at the operational or perhaps even the tactical level. The last thing that we need is a repeat of Vietnam when airstrikes were being approved at the strategic level from the White House.²

Interdict enemy lines of communication. The second strategic imperative to achieve victory against ISIS and the global Islamic jihad is to interdict their lines of communication and support. We must cut off their flow of men, materiel, and resources by finding their transit routes and severing them. We should work with our allies to develop a better system to track the movements of jihadists seeking to enter into designated hot zones, such as the Syrian area of operations, which has become the base of operations for ISIS.

Additionally, our focus cannot be just on the belligerents; it must also be on the nation-states that sponsor them and support their activities. We have to follow the money. In the case of ISIS, oil revenues have been integral in sustaining their activities, and we need to identify the sources that are purchasing that oil on the black market.³



(Associated Press Photo by Zia Mazhar)

A Pakistani boy wearing a hat that reads "Allah," or God, holds a toy assault rifle as he surveys the crowd during a pro-Taliban demonstration 19 September 2001 in the Pakistani port town of Karachi.

The venerable DIME model tells us there are four elements to a nation's power—diplomatic, information, military, and economic. We can employ our economic element of national power at the strategic level to cut off the support to jihadist groups such as ISIS, as well as Boko Haram, al-Qaida, al-Nusra, Hamas, Hezbollah, Taliban, al-Aqsa Martyrs, Abu Sayyaf, and all the rest.

Win the information war. The third strategic imperative involves the second element of national power—information. We must win the information war. Our reticence in the West to castigate an enemy such as ISIS is confounding. Our own media sources spent more resources droning on about Abu Ghraib in Iraq than focusing on what ISIS is and the atrocities of Islamic jihadism. We cannot be victorious against this enemy if we lack the intestinal fortitude to simply declare who they are and what they do as evil. Yet, we continue to use the worn out excuse that "we do not want to offend Muslims." We do not have to do that, but we cannot abdicate the responsibility to win the war against extremist propaganda. This means denying the enemy a new sanctuary on the twenty-first century battlefield, the domain of social media.

The most important aspect of an effective information operation against ISIS and others is to

document success on the battlefield. However, when we are reluctant to take the enemy on in this domain, they turn it into positive propaganda for their purposes. In turn, some young people living under the liberty and freedom of the West find the enemy's messages attractive, and they seek to join with jihadist groups. This is unconscionable.

And, let's stop referring to jihadist detainees as "prisoners of war." They are not; they are unlawful enemy combatants and do not deserve either constitutional rights or the rights afforded under the Geneva Convention. An important aspect of the information war is that, while our kindness and benevolence may be in keeping with our principles and values, to the enemy they indicate abject weakness.

Reduce the enemy's sphere of influence. The last strategic imperative necessary to achieve success against ISIS and the global Islamic jihad is to cordon off the enemy and reduce their sphere of influence. We must shrink the enemy's territory. Sadly, we are not effective in disallowing the promulgation and proliferation of Islamic extremist ideology. And, here in the United States, we are mistakenly allowing this ideology a base of operations under the guise of freedom of religion, not wanting to recognize that this ideology is in conflict with America's fundamental principles and values. Case in point: the continued policy characterization of Nidal Hasan's 2009 attack at Fort Hood as "workplace violence," when, in fact, the truth was uncovered during his trial; his attack was clearly jihadism.⁴ If we do not block the exportation of such Islamic jihadism, we will have movements such as ISIS grow even more widespread.

Operational and Tactical Imperatives

These four strategic imperatives easily translate into operational theater imperatives as well. We must understand that we do not have a war in Afghanistan or a war in Iraq; we have one war with combat theaters of operation, and the commanders in those theaters need concise, strategic-level guidance in order to develop their own guidance for their subordinates. Clear strategic- and operational-level imperatives will enable better guidance for tactical-level commanders.

At the tactical level there are five imperatives: find, fix, engage, destroy, and pursue. These imperatives are

nested in the overall strategic- and operational-level objectives. Our intelligence assets must find the enemy and, when the enemy is found, we must use strategic- and operational-level assets to support our tactical-level forces by fixing the enemy in place, interdicting their flow of support, and denying them sanctuary. When these conditions are met, it becomes easier at the tactical level to directly engage and destroy the enemy with immediately available weapon systems. We must then continue to support our tactical-level forces in pursuing the enemy to bring about its complete destruction, not allowing the enemy to escape as happened in 2001 in the mountains around Tora Bora in Afghanistan.⁵

These strategic, operational, and tactical imperatives are enemy-focused, and their success depends on our knowing the enemy—not dismissing their goals, objectives, and declared intentions.

Refocusing Our Efforts and Redesigning Our Army

What must we do to achieve Sun Tzu's maxim of "knowing yourself"? We can no longer become mired down in the business of nation building. We must instead refocus our efforts on conducting simultaneous strike operations across the battlefield. This means we must move toward a power projection force instead of a Cold War-era, forward-deployed force structure. One of our most immediate needs is to restructure our military, not based upon a budget, but rather by our strategic goals and the requirements of each area of responsibility as identified by the geographic combatant commands (Pacific, European, Africa, Southern, Northern, and Central Commands). This regional alignment can be done in a fiscally responsible way, but it must be expeditionary—based upon deployable forces from maritime and aerial platforms. And, we must include the solidification of strategic partnerships. We can work with other nations and bring to bear a unified, potent capability and capacity.

Sadly, we are going in the wrong direction by decimating our armed force structure. We are playing a shell game with our force structure, shifting forces here and there instead of having dedicated forces that are able to conduct operations to deny the enemy establishing itself. We need to construct a twenty-first century military that can contend with the fluid situation created by conflicts between state and nonstate actors across



(Photo by Ishtiaq Mahsud, Associated Press)

Pakistani Taliban spokesman Shahidullah Shahid, flanked by his bodyguards, talks to reporters 5 October 2013 at an undisclosed location in the Pakistani tribal area of Waziristan. The United States and its allies must work to deny organizations like the Taliban sanctuary in regions such as Waziristan and limit their ability to export their ideology through the media.

the combatant commands. Again, this is not about developing large overseas bases but about the ability to launch and strike the enemy with lethal and ferocious force, as we saw in the ninety-day campaign that dislodged the Taliban and al-Qaida from Afghanistan in 2001.⁶ We don't need to show up with a massive one hundred thousand-man force. Remember, our goal is no longer nation building.

The Marine Air Ground Task Force, utilizing brigade/regimental combat task force formations, has become a model for deploying force structures. During my time as an exchange officer at Camp Lejeune with the II Marine Expeditionary Force, I came to realize the potency of that structure. The U.S. Army needs to move toward the same type of structure; it is time to break the phalanx and think differently. An Army brigade task force needs to be fully integrated with readily available Army air support. I believe we should transfer the A-10 Warthog to the U.S. Army to ensure we have timely, close air support for the ground commander; remember the tactical imperative to engage the enemy with immediately available weapon systems. And, Army units must learn to deploy from maritime assets, like the 10th

Mountain Division was prepared to do from an aircraft carrier for a potential operation into Haiti in 1994.⁷ We must be able to project combat power from the littorals and extend it inland.

A final, critical factor in the redesign of our military is the necessity of finding Department of Defense leaders who understand the three levels of warfare and have some combat experience, instead of designating those leadership positions as rewards for political patronage. We have a defense industrial complex that tells the military what it needs based upon the whims of congressional members who are concerned mainly with jobs programs in their respective districts and states. We have a research and development, acquisition, and procurement system that is heavily weighed down and constrains our warfighters' ability to get timely weapon systems. We produce strategic reviews and studies that create mountains of paper that few read and no one implements. What we need are elected officials who understand that not every dollar in Washington, D.C., is equal, and that our military cannot be the bill payer for fiscally irresponsible parochialism.

Conclusion

All the aforementioned recommendations would have an impact on fighting ISIS and the global Islamic jihad. However, as Carl von Clausewitz articulated with his “paradoxical trinity,” the spirit of the American warrior is unmatched but it is the lack of spirit from the nation and from the government that is hindering our victory against this enemy.⁸

Our nation must come to the realization that peace does come through strength, and the ability to have capable forces deployed at the ready is a deterrent to our enemies. I do not subscribe to our being a global police force, but these are extraordinary times where we have an enemy that is beheading and crucifying innocent people. This enemy is forcing a mass migration of people that will have significant domestic ramifications for Western nations. ISIS and the global Islamic jihad can be defeated and its ideology delegitimized, but someone has

to lead, and that responsibility falls to the United States. This enemy must be made to respect strength and might, which we have not displayed. Going forward, national security strategy cannot be determined by campaign promises and rhetoric because the enemy has votes.

I close by repeating Sun Tzu’s quote, “If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.” In this current conflagration against ISIS and the global Islamic jihad, our Nation refuses to know the enemy. We struggle to know ourselves, and we are decimating our military capability and capacity. Therefore, we find ourselves losing the battle. We lost in Vietnam, not from the tactical level, but from the strategic level; let us not allow history to repeat itself. ■

Lt. Col. Allen B. West, U.S. Army, retired, is the president and CEO of the National Center for Policy Analysis. He is a former member of the U. S. Congress, where he represented Florida’s 22nd District. He is a Fox News contributor, a senior fellow at the London Center for Policy Research, and regularly writes for numerous media outlets. West’s military career included deployments to Iraq in support of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm and, later, Operation Iraqi Freedom; he also deployed to Afghanistan as a civilian advisor during Operation Enduring Freedom.

Notes

Epigraph. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Lionel Giles (Norwalk, CT: The Puffet Press, 1910), 52.

1. “The Taliban,” Council on Foreign Relations website, accessed 3 November 2015, http://www.cfr.org/terrorist-organizations-and-networks/taliban/p35985?cid=marketing_use-taliban_infoguide-012115#!; Matt Vespa, “Terrific: Taliban Strength At Its Strongest Level In Afghanistan Since 2001,” Townhall website, accessed 3 November 2015, <http://townhall.com/tipsheet/mattvespa/2015/10/13/terrific-taliban-strength-at-its-strongest-level-in-afghanistan-since-2001-n2065138>.

2. Dennis M. Drew, “Rolling Thunder 1965: Anatomy of a Failure,” CADRE Paper Report No. AU-ARI-CP-86-3 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, October 1986), Airpower Research Institute, accessed 3 November 2015, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/readings/drew2.htm>.

3. Hamza Hendawi and Qassim Abdul-Zahra, “ISIS Is Making up to \$50 Million a Month from Oil Sales,” Associated Press report published in *Business Insider*, 23 October 2015, accessed 3 November 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/isis-making-50-million-a-month-from-oil-sales-2015-10>.

4. Ned Berkowitz, “Dem Blames ‘Political Correctness’ for Fort Hood ‘Workplace Violence’ Controversy,” *ABC News*, 7 May 2013, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2013/05/dem-blames-political-correctness-for-fort-hood-massacre-controversy/>; Michael Daly, “Nidal Hasan’s Murders Termed ‘Workplace Violence’ by U.S.,” *The Daily Beast* website, 6 August 2013, accessed 3 November 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/08/06/nidal-hasan-s-murders-termed-workplace-violence-by-u-s.html>.

5. Yaniv Barzilai, “How Bin Laden Escaped in 2001—The Lessons of Tora Bora,” *The Daily Beast* website, 15 December 2015, accessed 3 November 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/12/15/how-bin-laden-escaped-in-2001-the-lessons-of-tora-bora.html>.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Sean C. McGovern, “Army Assault from a Navy Carrier,” *Army Logistician* 28(5) (September–October 1996), accessed 3 November 2015, <http://www.almc.army.mil/alog/issues/sepoct/ms992.htm>.

8. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 30.