
Strategy for an Ideological Campaign: Developing the Strategy

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Content of Briefing

- Previous briefing dealt with two questions:
 - The relationship between ideology and national strategy
 - Discussion of Islamism's strengths and weaknesses
- This briefing concentrates on three major aspects of strategy:
 - Approaches (lines of attack)
 - Categories of activities
 - Coordination and implementation
- It ends with brief description of global and selected country-specific/regional strategies

Approaches (Lines of Attack)

Two Sets of Approaches

How to affect what members of a given audience believe:

- Through “messaging,” ideas, arguments, propaganda etc.
 1. Undermining belief in Islamism as something choice-worthy
 2. Inculcating belief in inevitability of defeat of Islamism
- Through changes in their situation
 3. Improving (i.e., liberalizing) actual political/economic conditions
 4. Promoting sociological change

Undermining Belief in Islamism – I

Attempt to undermine belief by portraying Islamism:

- As un-Islamic:

- Islamism rejects much of traditional Islamic scholarship on law and political life
- Islamism downplays “spiritual” aspects of Islam (e.g., Sufi traditions)
- Khomeini overturned traditional Shi’a “quietism”

- As hostile to many traditional cultural practices of Muslim populations:

- Islamist destruction of shrines (e.g., in Pakistan, Mali)
- Islamist rejection of many Muslim cultural traditions
 - Taliban prohibitions on, e.g., kite flying, music
- Iranian clerics tried to ban Nowruz celebrations, but failed.

Undermining Belief in Islamism - II

- As ridiculous:
 - Can be portrayed as boastful, impractical, hypocritical
- As harmful to Muslims:
 - Has led to indiscriminate violence: Source of *fitna* (strife) among Muslims
 - Has not produced beneficial or stable rule
- As unnecessarily strict and repressive
 - Thwarts normal human desires

Inculcating Belief in Inevitable Defeat

- Different from previous point, but related
 - In principle, an ideology can be choice-worthy even if it is losing out politically
 - In practice, we regard “being on the wrong side of history” as evidence of wrongness
- Two questions:
 - Under what conditions does loss of faith in an ideology’s possibility of victory lead to a loss of belief in its goodness?
 - Can we portray Islamism as losing, as being headed for defeat?

Does Islamism Promise Success?

The Concept of Martyrdom

- Most “counter-ideologies” to liberalism have promised that their success is inevitable:
 - Communism: “scientific” basis for claim that socialism will replace capitalism
 - Nazism: victory due to racial superiority
- Islamism claims a divine guarantee of success
 - Thus, defeat should undermine belief in it
- However, two “positive” explanations for defeat:
 - “Temporary setbacks” as a “test” of believers’ faith
 - Martyrdom as a benefit
- As a result, demoralization as a result of defeat by military means or law enforcement will be slow in coming

How do Terrorists Understand Success?

- Difficult to assess success in counterterrorism:
 - It is often said of terrorists that, if they are not wiped out, they are winning: i.e., every terrorist act is seen as a “victory”
- However, intense effort al Qaida (and other terrorists) put into propaganda suggests a vulnerability:
 - Need to reassure supporters that they are making progress
 - Hope to demoralize us (because they see us as weak)
- AQ is arguably close to defeat:
 - Loss of popular support in Muslim countries
 - Blocking of financial support
 - Killing of key operatives
- How does this affect views of Islamism’s prospects?

Inculcating Belief in Inevitable Defeat: Is Islamism Losing?

“When we consider the Muslim world as a whole, the opposition Islamist movements still face an unprecedented moral crisis. Their political project – which was always vague in its promises of a radiant Islamic state applying the sharia – now has a track record showing that it banks on the future but is mired in the past. The random violence of the 1990s ... was still fresh in people’s memories.”
-- French expert Gilles Keppel, writing in 2002.

Inculcating Belief in Inevitable Defeat: Current Situation

- Since victory over Soviets in Afghanistan, Islamism has suffered a string of military defeats:
 - Defeat of Algerian insurgency by the end of the 1990s
 - Overthrow of Turabi in Sudan, 1999
 - Defeat of Taliban regime in 2001
 - Defeat of Sunni insurgency in Iraq, 2007-08
 - Capture or killing of AQ leaders (bin Laden, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Zarqawi, etc.)
- Until recently, "Islamism no political progress"
 - Sadat assassination led to thirty years of Mubarak
 - Taliban's collapse showed political as well as military weakness

What will be the effect of the Arab Spring?

Effects of the Islamist Electoral Victories

- “Antidote” to any demoralization due to string of prior defeats
 - Victories due to democratic process – creating ideological dissonance for many Islamists
- Islamist parties will be in power – a “rendezvous with reality”
 - Will have to deal with practical problems of governance
 - Likely disagreements among Islamists (E.g., Muslim Brotherhood vs Salafis in Egypt)
 - Undercuts apparent simplicity of “Islam is the Solution”

Islamism at a Crossroads?

- How will Islamist parties react to the difficulties they will have in governing?
 - Pragmatism? Integration into world economy?
 - Increased radicalization? Shifting blame?
- U.S. will have to work with Islamist-led governments
 - How much aid? Should U.S. policy favor success of these governments?
 - If Islamist government follows a pragmatic course, when does its Islamism stop being an issue for us?
 - Key criterion: Does it still see U.S./West as inherently hostile to Islam?

Liberalizing Political/Economic Conditions

- Historically, the most effective method of defeating the “counter-ideologies” to liberalism
 - At least as far as the bulk of the population is concerned
- Key point is economic opportunity – the opportunity for individuals to improve their condition
 - Attention directed to practical concerns
 - Fanaticism seems less attractive
- However, doesn't defeat the counter-ideologies completely
 - Resentment on the part of those who fail
 - Certain elites react to “ignobility” of modern liberal society
 - Fear of loss of “identity” (success appears to be a form of “selling out”)

Improving Political/Economic Conditions Bush's "Democracy Agenda"

Value depends on whole panoply of elements of "liberal democracy"

- ❑ opportunity (economic, social, political)
- ❑ concentration on improving standard of living, practical improvements, etc.
- ❑ diversity of opinion, belief; freedom of expression; tolerance
- In absence of these other aspects of "liberal democracy," movement toward democracy (i.e., elections) can bolster Islamism:
 - ❑ Palestinian elections of 2006
 - ❑ Arab Spring elections

Phasing the Elements of Democracy

- In principle, better to phase in other elements of liberal democracy before holding elections:
 - Economic opportunity, free markets
 - Freedom of expression, religion
 - Openness to rest of world (communication, travel, etc.)
- Often, this is not feasible:
 - Authoritarian regimes are often unwilling to liberalize
 - Economic reform can lead to “crony capitalism”
 - In a chaotic situation, elections are only way to form “legitimate” government

Promoting Sociological Change

- Key issue is role of women, changes in family structure
 - Role of women is changing in much of the Muslim world
 - Fall in fertility rates is most striking effect
 - Increases in women's education
 - Extent to which sociological changes affects the appeal of Islamism is unclear
- Part of modernization process
 - In short run, the disruptions involved may bolster Islamism (as an “identity” marker)
 - Even among women
 - In long run, should undermine much of impetus for Islamism
 - In particular, Islamist emphasis on guarding the traditional family structure and family “honor”

Modernization and Religion

- Older view (modernization = secularization) has been revised
- Example of evangelical Protestantism in East Asia and Latin America
 - Associated with modernization (work ethic, optimism, rejection of old order)
- Example of Turkey
 - Small entrepreneurs as backbone of the AKP

Effects of Sociological Change

- Modernization not incompatible with greater religiosity
 - Question centers on the character of that religiosity
- Two trends:
 - Increasing strictness in observance and doctrine
 - Tendency to retreat into groups of like-minded individuals; loss of connection with traditional social context
- Can Islamism play a role similar to evangelical Protestantism?
 - Sociological similarities
 - Doctrinal differences

Categories of Activities

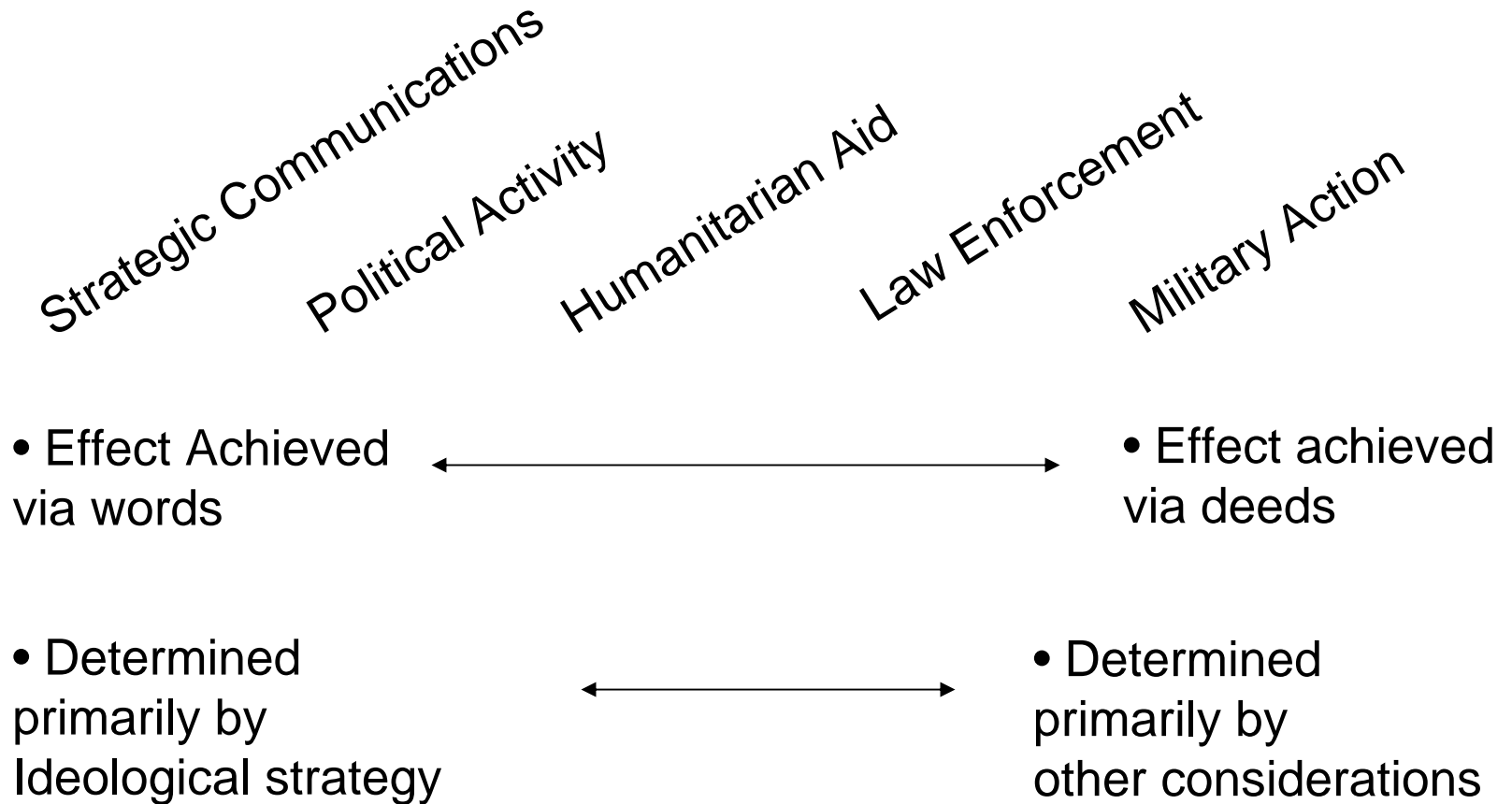
Challenge of Categorization

- No accepted categorization of the types of activities that can influence the ideological situation
 - Many relevant things happen, especially in cultural/sociological realms, regardless of anyone's intent to exert influence
- Best familiar analogy: an electoral campaign
 - Direct appeal for support
 - Discrediting the opponent
 - Demoralizing the opposition (to reduce turnout)
 - Specific political actions
 - Use of force (illegal or under color of law)
 - Not in an orderly democracy, but such practices exist elsewhere.

Categories of Activities

- A spectrum of activities, from “pure” persuasion to the use of force:
 - Strategic communication
 - Political activity
 - Development and humanitarian aid
 - Law enforcement and financial regulation
 - Military force
- Relative importance of ideological vs other objectives in determining activities varies across the spectrum

Spectrum of Activities



Strategic Communications

- Direct messaging: by government officials, spokesmen, government-run radio and TV, etc.
- Indirect messaging: affecting the messaging of others
 - Overt and discreet encouragement and material support for others' speech
 - Interfering with and devaluing others' speech; discrediting hostile speakers
- Key importance of “indirect messaging”
 - Some key messages must come from Muslim voices (e.g., arguments about the correct interpretation of Islam)
 - Low USG credibility with key audiences

Direct Messaging

Speaking in USG's name

- USG's minimal credibility with most relevant audiences makes this the least important aspect of the strategy
- Nevertheless, some opportunities:
 - Leverage U.S. actions, e.g., humanitarian aid, other assistance
 - Emphasize Islamist outrages, missteps, failures

Indirect Messaging

Amplifying favorable voices and hindering hostile ones

- Favorable voices

- Non-Islamist religious authorities
- Cultural personalities

- Methods of “amplification”

- Financial support (fellowships, honoraria)
- Networking opportunities (conferences)
- Platforms (creation of new media, publishing opportunities)

- Methods of distancing USG

- Quasi-governmental organizations (NED model)
- Quietly encouraging private organizations to act
- Covert action

Indirect Messaging – II

- Hostile voices
 - Identifying, tracking key hostile voices
 - Debating/refuting hostile voices
 - “Opposition research” – discrediting hostile voices
- Intelligence issue:
 - Priority for ideological issues
 - Exploitation of open sources: requires a new institution?

Direct and Indirect Persuasion

- Direct = *argumentation* directed at undermining belief in Islamism or in its eventual victory
- Indirect = *other forms of discourse* directed at the same result:
 - “Serious” literature
 - “Popular” literature and drama (e.g. soap operas)
 - Music
 - Humor and satire
- Role of American popular culture
 - Widespread and influential, regardless of an intent to persuade
 - Double-edged sword: can convince audiences that Islamism is only bulwark against decadence and immorality

Political Action

- Affect opinions by highlighting specific points via political activity on behalf of a specific proposal
 - In a political campaign, a candidate may propose a specific measure in order to highlight a certain point, or make the opposition look bad by opposing it
 - Candidate may seek “wedge issues” – to focus attention on an issue that splits the opposition
- May be done directly (USG raises issue internationally) or indirectly (supporting political activity in foreign countries)
 - E.g., support for civil society groups that raise specific issues related to democracy, human rights

Example: Women's Issues

- Most promising area for political activity
 - Attracts support in West independently of any strategic considerations
 - Sociological changes (literacy, urbanization, access to higher education and job market) affect women's roles and aspirations
 - Hence, a potential constituency
- Challenges many aspects of Islamism:
 - Formal legal equality for women seen as against Shari'a
 - Many issues involving women (access to the workplace, dress standards) are divisive issues for Islamists

Humanitarian and Development Aid

- Can be used to:
 - Undermine the basic Islamist narrative that West is inevitably hostile to Islam and to Muslims
 - Promote favorable political/economic/sociological change
- Extent to which aid projects can be designed and implement *strategically*
 - In terms of character of projects
 - In terms of beneficiaries
 - In terms of who gets credit
- Issues
 - Relationship to other goals for these activities
 - Flexibility and legal requirements

Law Enforcement and Financial Regulation

- Use of law enforcement and financial regulation against Islamists, dependent upon
 - Urgency and seriousness of specific threats
 - Considerations legality and accepted norms of behavior
- Use of such actions to hamper Islamist voices
 - U.S. First Amendment concerns vs outlawing support for terrorism
- Extent to which such actions should be affected by considerations of “strategic communications”
 - To convey sense of inevitable defeat
 - To suggest dissension in ranks
- Guarding against counterproductive actions

Military Action

- How do military actions affect ideological attitudes? Two possibilities:
 - Successful, persistent U.S./Western military action causes fear and discouragement
 - U.S./Western military action creates hostility and feeds narrative that West is hostile to Islam
- In any case, U.S./Western military weakness or irresolution provides encouragement to Islamists

When does military defeat produce demoralization, resignation, and submission, rather than resentment and resistance?

Being Feared While Not Being Hated

- After asserting that it is more important to be feared than loved, Machiavelli continues:

a prince ought to inspire fear in such a way that, if he does not win love, he avoids hatred; because he can endure very well being feared whilst he is not hated...

The Prince, Chap 17

- Can we apply this to military action?
- Example of Germany after the world wars:
 - Resentment, revival of nationalism after World War I
 - Democratization, integration into Europe after World War II

Coordination and Implementation

Three Problems of Coordination

- Ideological situation is potentially affected by everything that USG does
 - Hence, the facile talk about using “all means of national power” and the question of inter-agency coordination
- However, some of these means aim primarily at purposes other than ideological ones
 - Raising the problem of how these means are coordinated substantively
- Importance of private sector
 - USG can provide support: direct or indirect (e.g., via NED-like organization)
 - USG encouragement, formal and informal

An Old Problem

- Planning group proposal (1951):
 - “unification of political warfare,” understood as “inter-connected simultaneous use of all instruments of international action”
- Nitze’s objection:
 - “If [PSB is] to formulate programs ‘geared for psychological effect’ in field of military, political and economic action ... there would be no stopping place short of assuming jurisdiction over the whole range of our foreign policy...”
- Truman established “Psychological Strategy Board”:
 - Purpose: “the formulation and promulgation, as guidance to ... departments and agencies ... of over-all national psychological objectives, policies and programs, and for the coordination and evaluation of the national psychological effort”

A Bureaucratic Solution?

- Usual solution: some sort of inter-agency committee and process
 - Is unanimous decision required?
 - If so, how to avoid watered-down results?
 - If not, how are decisions enforced?
 - Deus ex machina: Presidential involvement
- This issue goes deeper
 - Requires common understanding throughout national security apparatus of the importance of the “war of ideas”

Key Requirement

Influence the way in which each part of the national security apparatus understands its mission:

- State Department's "transformational diplomacy"
- COIN as permanent part of military's mission
- Development/humanitarian assistance to emphasize issues of governance, effect on public opinion
- International broadcasting to adopt strategic perspective (vice "journalistic" model)
 - Alternatively, create new broadcasting platforms

Other Requirements

- Collection and analysis efforts focused on ideological trends in Islamism
 - Importance of open source collection (e.g., websites)
- Legislative relief
 - Flexibility with respect to expenditures (e.g., CERP)
- Increased ability to encourage private sector activity
 - Create government-funded private corporation (NED model)
 - Informal USG contact with universities, foundations, religious groups, etc.

Strategies

Global vs Regional/National Strategies

- Islamism is a global phenomenon
 - Claims to be the correct interpretation of a “universal” religion
 - Addressed to all peoples
 - Duty to spread the religion through *dawa* and *jihad*
 - Makes effective use of “globalization” of communication and travel
 - Islamism as a globalizing force: a “solvent” of local cultures, folkways, traditions
- However, audiences are diverse in terms of nationality, cultural and religious traditions, language and sect.
 - These variations provide avenues for appealing to these audiences
 - Many of these avenues are not available to Islamism
- Both global and regional/national strategies required

Global: Undermining belief in Islamism

- Support for wide variety of anti-Islamist voices
 - Including proponents of liberal democracy
 - Most of this should be indirect support
 - Through indirect USG funding (e.g., NED model)
 - USG encouragement of private funding
- Continuing use of law enforcement and military means against terrorist groups
 - To convey sense that these groups are failing
- Promotion of women's rights, access to education, economic opportunities

Egypt: Testing the Possibility of Moderation

- Ground zero for Islamism’s “rendezvous with reality”
 - Major economic problems
 - Muslim Brotherhood – Salafi competition
 - Islamists will be forced to address real issues and reconcile their beliefs with practical actions
- This creates opportunity to:
 - Influence development of Islamist thought
 - Support non-Islamist voices
 - USG credibility at rock-bottom
 - Support must be given indirectly
- Support for free-market oriented economic development
 - Build constituency for liberal democratic parties

Western Europe: Adaptation to Liberal Democracy

- USG role subordinate to that of allied governments
- Encourage integration into West European societies:
 - Support trend away from “multiculturalism”
 - Use of exchange programs, etc. to increase familiarization with American experience
 - Sociologically, integration is proceeding
- Economic opportunity as key issue
 - Basis of integration into host society
- Support adaptation of Islam to western conditions
 - “Minority jurisprudence”
 - “Reform” efforts

Back Up Slides

Excerpt from Congressional Hearing

7 December 2011

REP. LUNGREN: Secretary Stockton, are we at war with violent Islamist extremism?

ASD STOCKTON: No, sir. We are at war with al Qaeda, its affiliates --

LUNGREN: OK, I understand that. My question is, is violent Islamist extremism at war with us?

STOCKTON: No, sir. We are being attacked by al Qaeda and its allies.

LUNGREN: Is al Qaeda -- can it be described as being an exponent of violent Islamist extremism?

STOCKTON: The al Qaeda are murderers with an ideological agenda.

LUNGREN: That wasn't my question. My question was, is al Qaeda acting out violent Islamist extremism?

STOCKTON: Al Qaeda is a violent organization dedicated to overthrowing the values that we intend to advance.

Excerpt, continued

LUNGREN: Yes or no?

STOCKTON: ... I'll make it as clear as I can. We are not at war with Islam.

LUNGREN: I didn't ask that. I did not ask that, sir. I asked whether we're at war with violent Islamist extremism. That's my question.

STOCKTON: No. We're at war with al Qaeda and its allies.

LUNGREN: Al Qaeda -- how does al Qaeda define itself? Are they dedicated to violent Islamist extremism?

STOCKTON: Al Qaeda would love to convince Muslims around the world that the United States is at war with Islam.

LUNGREN: I didn't say that.

STOCKTON: That is a prime propaganda tool. And I'm not going to aid and abet that effort to advance their propaganda goals.

LUNGREN: Is there a difference between Islam and violent Islamist extremism?

STOCKTON: Sir, with great respect, I don't believe it's helpful to frame our adversary as Islamic with any set of qualifiers that we might add, because we are not at war with Islam.