

# AL QAEDA'S GLOBAL INSURGENCY: AIRPOWER IN THE BATTLE FOR LEGITIMACY

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*"The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose."*

*-Clausewitz, On War, 1832*

*"Our troops are getting killed...it's time to really start kicking some ass."*

*-AF Major, 23 March, day 4 of combat in Iraq*

In his State of the Union address on the evening of January 29, 2003, President Bush reviewed some of the successes in the War on Terror to date. In addition, he took the opportunity to make the case for a strong stance on Iraqi disarmament, citing the "nexus between terrorism and weapons of mass destruction." As he spoke, much of the nation and the world were shifting their focus to the upcoming struggle with Saddam Hussein.

The day before the speech, a much less publicized event was unfolding outside the media spotlight in Afghanistan. According to American Forces Press Service, "U.S. Special Forces and Afghan militia troops are engaged in heavy fighting against rogue guerrillas near the town of Spin Boldak." A captured guerrilla put the size of the force at more than 80, and U.S. Apache helicopters, B-1 bombers, F-16's and AC-130's were turned loose on the remainder. As of press time, the report concluded, "the fighting continues."<sup>1</sup>

While the success of U.S. led coalition forces in bringing down the Taliban government has been impressive, clearly the enemy has not given up. Some may dismiss current assaults on friendly forces as mere harassment. Nonetheless, such attacks highlight the difficulty of fighting a zealous and determined enemy despite unquestionable U.S. military superiority. As this paper will demonstrate, Al Qaeda's terrorist network amounts to no less than a **global insurgency**. The War on Terror--the overarching, or parent conflict, to all sub-operations waged to make the world safe from repeats of September 11—is a war of counterinsurgency. The U.S. military has both doctrine and experience that addresses counterinsurgency, and those ideas should be applied to all aspects of this war. Such a framework will serve as a useful lens through which to identify both strategies and pitfalls in the War on Terror. Likewise, a review of the characteristics of counterinsurgency as they relate to terrorism will shed light on the use of airpower in the challenges that lay ahead.

## **Basics: The What, How, and Why of Insurgency**

### **What.**

In 1990, the Air Force and the Army collaborated to write a joint publication known to the Air Force as AF Pamphlet 3-20, Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict (Army Field Manual 100-20). It defines an insurgency as "an organized, armed political struggle whose goal may be the seizure of power through revolutionary takeover and replacement of the existing government. In some case, however, an insurgency's goals may be more limited. For example, the insurgency may intend to break away from government control and establish an autonomous state within traditional ethnic or religious territorial bounds. The insurgency may also intend to extract limited political concessions unattainable through less violent means." Insurgents, then, intend to change the current power structure. Familiar insurgencies include the Vietcong movement to overthrow the government of South Vietnam, the struggle to expel the Soviets from Afghanistan, and the many Marxist movements to seize power in Central and South America. All of these conflicts involved a quest to alter the political landscape through the use of violence against the party in power.

Insurgencies arise as a result of intense discontent, a dissatisfaction with the current political and social reality. This often is in opposition to a ruling party, colonial occupation, social order, religious majority, or entire government system. When people believe that their grievances cannot be addressed within the current structure, such popular discontent provides the momentum for leaders to mobilize supporters for action. Mobilization includes raising funds, training fighters, organizing, acquiring supplies and weapons, and planning.<sup>2</sup>

### **How.**

Overall strategies for insurgency may take various forms. The overall pattern, however, is to begin by mobilizing resources as described above. Once leaders determine a sufficient amount of resources have been mobilized, they begin to take action. "Sufficient" does not mean "large." Insurgencies commonly start small. By avoiding direct confrontation with government forces, they reduce their risk. Such action "has consistently been the choice of the weak who oppose the strong, for it enables them to avoid direct, decisive confrontations and rely on harassment and surprise."<sup>3</sup> Insurgents attempt to weaken the legitimacy of the ruling power while building their own in the eyes of the populace. Often, this manifests in sporadic attacks against government targets in an effort to show the impotence of those in power. Small symbolic attacks aimed at showing the incompetence of the government increase support for the movement, bring in new members, and allow the organization to grow. Organization and operations become more sophisticated. As the government appears weaker and weaker, the insurgents appear stronger. Eventually the situation reaches a critical phase and the insurgents are able to confront the government directly, in a more conventional battle, and take control.

The progression from small unconventional or subversive groups to large conventional military units is sometimes described as distinct phases of insurgent or revolutionary war. What is important to remember is that the progression can vary in speed over the course of the struggle, a movement can be in various stages in different regions, and it can even revert to previous phases should conditions warrant. Insurgencies are often protracted struggles, and in general, time is the

insurgent's friend. Research has shown that the average Viet Cong soldier fought an average of one in thirty days.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes, mere survival is a legitimate victory for the insurgent.

While not essential to insurgent victory, external support can speed up the process. AFP3-20 describes four types of support. *Moral support* helps frame the insurgents' actions as justified and right. *Political support* promotes the insurgents' cause in international forums. *Resources* include money, weapons, food, advisors and training. *Sanctuary* provides secure operating and training bases.

Insurgencies are often described in the context of environment. This includes the cultural, demographics, climate, and terrain in which the war is being fought. Insurgents attempt to use such features to their advantage by hiding in difficult terrain, blending in with the populace, and exploiting surrounding cultural features.

### **Why.**

The insurgents must have a plan for correcting the wrongdoing of those in power. The plan must promise great improvement after the government is replaced. Ideology provides the motivation for action. It is ideology that justifies the use of violence and inspires insurgents to risk danger. Again, such ideology can be political (as with the many Marxist revolutionaries of the late Twentieth Century), religious, social, or any combination. The insurgent leaders rely on the effective communication of their ideology to win others to the cause. The clearer and more convincing the vision, the more committed the movement.

### **Al Qaeda: Global Insurgency**

Traditionally, insurgencies are internal conflicts. That is, they are aimed at effecting change within the borders of a nation. Actual operations may occur across borders of neighboring states, and as the term implies, external support can flow from other nations. But an insurgency is thought of in terms of a struggle against a national government. Applying the concept of insurgency to a global context may be new, but it is not difficult. The same principles apply.

Let's start with the goal. Insurgencies are trying to alter power structures—overthrow governments, change the social order, remedy perceived injustices. What is Al Qaeda trying to accomplish? Army War College professor Dr. Stephen Biddle expertly characterizes the group's goal:

First, the group is radically separatist. Al Qaeda seeks to preserve a puritanical, strictly fundamentalist Islam by isolating it from the destructive influences of modern, and especially Western, culture...Only by eliminating the temptation of Western ideas can the community of the faithful properly serve Allah. In the near term, this mandates the expulsion of all Western presence from Arabia; eventually, it implies the need to cleanse all Islam of Western influence...A strictly observant Islamic world of Al Qaeda's design would inevitably find itself in conflict with Western ideas it could not possibly wall off beyond its shores...Al

Qaeda's separatist ideology thus puts it on an inevitable collision course with our basic way of life.<sup>5</sup>

While Al Qaeda is not trying to separate from a government per se, it is trying to separate Islam from Western influence—political, religious, and cultural influence. This certainly represents a change in the power structure that is global in scale.

What's the motive? Ideology is critically important to an insurgency. It fuels the fire and inspires action. Al Qaeda has nothing if not ideology. Osama bin Laden has clearly explained of the group's motivation in many statements over the past several years. According to the U.S. State Department, in August, 1996, Osama bin Laden signed and issued a declaration of jihad (holy war) from Afghanistan entitled, "Message from Osama bin Laden to his Muslim Brothers in the Whole World and Especially in the Arabian Peninsula: Declaration of Jihad Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Mosques; Expel the Heretics from the Arabian Peninsula."<sup>6</sup> In December, 1998, he issued a statement that said, in part, "Hostility toward America is a religious duty, and we hope to be rewarded for it by God."<sup>7</sup> Statements revealing the group's ideology abound. Here are a few:

After three months passed since the blessed attacks against the global infidelity, against America, the head of infidelity, and after almost two months passed since the beginning of the vicious crusade campaign against Islam, we would like to talk about some of the meanings of these events. These events revealed many issues that are significant to Muslims.

Our terrorism is a good accepted terrorism because it's against America, it's for the purpose of defeating oppression so America would stop supporting Israel, who is killing our children.

It became very clear that the West in general and America, head of the infidels in particular, bear hate and grudge against Islam and Muslims that cannot be described."<sup>8</sup>

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies, civilians, and the military, is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate al-Aqsa Mosque and the Holy Mosque from their grip and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated, and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty God, and 'fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together,' and 'fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God."<sup>9</sup>

How has Al Qaeda been pursuing its goals? Insurgents mobilize resources. They stage indirect, unconventional, harassing attacks aimed at destroying the enemy's legitimacy and support while putting the enemy on the defensive. Insurgents blend into the surrounding population and countryside, often operating from areas of sanctuary, in protracted, phased campaigns timed to their advantage.

Again, Al Qaeda bears a close resemblance to insurgency in this regard. Osama bin Laden and other leaders have succeeded in mobilizing those who are outraged at the influence, indeed the presence, of Westerners in the Islamic world. Bin Laden's own migration to violence was spurred by the stationing of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia, home of Islam's two holiest cities, Mecca and Medina, during the Gulf War. Many young Islamist radicals have found this sufficiently enraging to leave their families -and often affluent lives- behind to attend Al Qaeda training camps, and subsequently put that training to deadly use. While their attacks may not be aimed at showing government incompetence per se, they are aimed at shaking the American people's will to maintain a presence in the region. Such attacks may also serve to embolden those sympathetic to the Al Qaeda cause.<sup>10</sup>

Al Qaeda's operations have indeed been unconventional in a military sense. Of the fifteen attacks attributed to the group since 1998, two were airplane bombings, three car or truck bombs, and four were suicide attacks (including one in which the Al Qaeda operatives posed as journalists to kill the leader of Afghanistan's Northern Alliance). Two assaults were on a school or church, and the remaining two were the USS Cole bombing and those of September 11, 2001. With the exception of the Cole attack, all were on civilian "soft" targets. The Cole incident was a surprise suicide attack on a ship in port.<sup>11</sup>

When not carrying out attacks, Al Qaeda operatives train and organize in remote regions around the world. Until recently, Afghanistan served as a textbook sanctuary. If they are not taking advantage of the protective features of difficult terrain, they are blending in to the global populace, from apartments in European cities to the flight schools of Florida's coastline. Other forms of external support--funding, intelligence, access, weapons, and the like--flow to the group from both state and non-state actors.

The group's insurgent nature allows it the flexibility to choose the time and place of its attacks. It may attack in rapid succession, or lay low—unconstrained by any external timetable. Remember, nearly two years passed between bombings of the World Trade Center. Like any insurgency, the group can be in different "phases" from region to region. If things are going well in one corner of the globe, operations can be expanded, even as they are being rolled back in another region.

While the War on Terror is in one sense "a war like none other our nation has faced,"<sup>12</sup> its nature is not entirely foreign to us. The power principles of counterinsurgency are well described in Air Force Doctrine. The task is simply to apply those principles to Al Qaeda's global effort to upset the current structure. Before that can be done, one must first understand the applicable doctrine.

### **Hitting the Books: What Does AF Doctrine Have to Say?**

Applicable Air Force Doctrine can be found in two publications. Air Force Doctrine Document 2-3, "Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW)," paints a broad descriptive picture of military operations "not associated with sustained, large-scale combat operations."<sup>13</sup> AFDD 2-3.1, "Foreign Internal Defense (FID)," goes into greater detail regarding certain types of MOOTW, including insurgency and counterinsurgency. Each has important information worthy of review in this discussion.

According to AFDD 2-3, several aspects of MOOTW set it apart from large-scale combat operations. In addition to the nine principles of war listed in Air Force Basic Doctrine (AFDD 1) and memorized by PME students far and wide, 2-3 lists six principles of MOOTW, three of which differ from the AFDD 1 list. The three newcomers, *restraint*, *perseverance*, and *legitimacy*, are discussed here.<sup>14</sup> The supremacy of political considerations in MOOTW is a central theme to all of these principles.

*Restraint* means using the minimum amount of force required to accomplish the task at hand. "Determining the appropriate level of force requires an understanding of...the overarching political goals."<sup>15</sup> While tactical results may be attained by applying a given amount of force, in some situations use of such force may prove to be counterproductive to achieving the strategic goal. AFDD 2-3 cautions commanders to develop an understanding of the local culture, the nature of the conflict, and the likely response of the population. Another aspect of restraint is "tailoring" a force, or identifying and deploying only what is necessary to the mission. The natural American military tendency to deploy more than is needed, and/or massing reserves, may cast doubt on U.S. intentions and increase political tension, thus making success less likely.<sup>16</sup>

*Perseverance* refers to the need to be patient and resolute in MOOTW because such operations are often protracted and frustrating. Nevertheless, attainment of strategic objectives may require long-term commitment. Again, this is primarily a political concept. It encompasses both the commitment of the U.S. populace (and therefore elected officials), as well as the people and government of the host nation (in global terms, this also applies to the international community). American policymakers should accurately identify strategic objectives and the conditions for ending military involvement prior to committing military forces.<sup>17</sup>

*Legitimacy* is, perhaps, paramount among the MOOTW principles. When militarily involved in the internal affairs of other nations, the U.S. must be "viewed as a legitimate actor in the mission, working towards international interests rather than just its own."<sup>18</sup> By establishing and maintaining legitimacy, the U.S. increases the chance of support both from the host nation populace and the American populace. What's more, other nations are less likely to interfere and more likely to lend assistance there is widespread international agreement that the U.S. is acting legitimately. Similarly, if the insurgents can establish legitimacy, if they can be seen as the side acting morally and for the good of the people, then it is they who reap those benefits.

Legitimacy is, in a sense, purely political. How U.S. actions are viewed by others is not classically a military concern. But a key point to understand is that although establishing legitimacy is largely a function of the nation's political leaders, military operations can have significant impact on how the U.S. is viewed by all parties.<sup>19</sup> AFDD 2-3 calls legitimacy "critically important" in MOOTW, but cautions that it may be difficult to establish in light of complex international relations. This difficulty is only compounded when the insurgents claim the globe as their battleground.

The second publication, AFDD 2-3.1, "Foreign Internal Defense", contains an appendix that specifically addresses insurgency and counterinsurgency. Much of the descriptive content found in AFP 3-20 now resides in AFDD 2-3.1. In addition to discussing insurgency's ideological

motivation, its leadership and organization, goals and objectives, phases of development and such, 2-3.1 highlights the critical importance of legitimacy in such conflicts.

"The contest is for legitimacy," the document states concisely.<sup>20</sup> The insurgent employs guerilla tactics to disrupt the government's operations. These attacks discredit the host nation's ability to keep order. They wear down the government's financial and material resources, further undermining its legitimacy and, more importantly, its resolve. Eventually, government forces may withdraw to more defensive positions. This allows the insurgents to establish control over certain areas, bolstering *their* legitimacy among the local populace.<sup>21</sup>

Both AFDD 2-3 and AFDD 2-3.1, as well as AFP 3-20, call for a multifaceted approach to counterinsurgency. Political, financial, social, legal, psychological, and military initiatives must all be conducted and carefully orchestrated toward the elimination of the insurgency. The government must ensure the security of the population, address legitimate social and economic grievances, prosecute illegal activity, and destroy the insurgent infrastructure. All of this must be conducted with an awareness of the overarching battle for legitimacy between the insurgents and the government.<sup>22</sup>

Without a doubt, the United States is conducting a multifaceted approach to the War on Terror. The U.S. has frozen the assets of any organization or individual connected to Al Qaeda. Intelligence and law enforcement agencies have formed historic partnerships to identify and capture agents both here and abroad. The Department of Homeland Security has coordinated efforts to protect U.S. citizens from attack. The Bush Administration has brought tremendous political pressure to bear on the world stage for nations to join in the fight against terrorism. But it is the military effort that is of concern here. Specifically, if Al Qaeda is akin to a global insurgency, and if AF doctrine on insurgency emphasizes politics and legitimacy, then what are the implications for the employment of U.S. airpower in the War on Terror?

### **So What? Implications for Airpower**

Perhaps the most famous model of a modern day air campaign belongs to Col John Warden. His "strategic rings" concept was the basis for the Desert Storm air campaign and is probably well known to most *ASPJ* readers. Warden's idea is that nation-states have five key centers of gravity. They are, in order of descending importance, leadership, key production facilities, infrastructure, civilian populace, and fielded military forces.<sup>23</sup> According to the model, the adversary is considered an integrated system, and these centers of gravity should be attacked near simultaneously (or "in parallel") when possible, with emphasis given in order of importance. Such a campaign is aimed at creating systemic paralysis—that is, in combination, such attacks will act synergistically to cause system-wide effects. The entire enemy system will grind to a halt, shocked, and virtually unable to respond. Warden himself has applied this concept to the fight against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The concept of system warfare, while new, is not difficult to understand. All organizations, including Al Qaeda and the Taliban government, are systems with distinct interconnected elements. Think of five concentric circles: The innermost circle contains the leadership elements (bin Laden, Taliban leaders); the second

circle from the inside contains process elements (such as communications and financing); the third circle contains infrastructure elements (airfields, training camps); the fourth contains demographic elements (Afghan civilians); and the fifth contains combatants (Taliban aircraft, bin Laden fighters).<sup>24</sup>

While insightful, the description is incomplete. If one looks at the operation in Afghanistan as an isolated case, then such an analysis may suffice. The Taliban indeed constituted a nation-state, with suitable specific rings prone to the kind of attack Warden espouses. The strategist must keep in mind, however, that Afghanistan is merely one operation in the global counterinsurgency against Al Qaeda.<sup>25</sup>

In a 1997 *APJ* article, then-Major Scott Walker called for a "unified approach" to applying airpower that "does not demand that we write our favorite target set down on stone tablets for the ages" and recognizes that "the ability to identify correctly the enemy's center of gravity in no way implies that all enemies, in all wars, must have the same center of gravity."<sup>26</sup> Rather, he proclaims, we should take into account the enemy at hand, his values, the political constraints and implications, available feedback, time available, and other such factors to properly identify his centers of gravity.

This approach appropriately dovetails with the War on Terror. The overarching conflict against Al Qaeda is a global counterinsurgency, encompassing many regional conflicts at various levels of intensity and conventionality around the world. We must therefore view each sub-conflict at two levels—that of the current local conflict and the insurgency of which it is a part. The one constant of all battles in the War on Terror, then, is the center of gravity for an insurgency—legitimacy. According to AFP 3-20, "legitimacy is the center of gravity for both the insurgents and the counterinsurgents."<sup>27</sup>

If legitimacy is indeed the most important center of gravity, how can airpower be used to strike it? Airpower is, in fact, ideally suited to the task of destroying the enemy's legitimacy and enhancing our own. The following discussion of four examples is by no means exhaustive, but hopefully will serve to spark thinking along similar lines on the part of the reader.

1. Intelligence. Adequate intelligence is of prime importance to counterinsurgency.<sup>28</sup> Air Force platforms have proven to be remarkably useful in this regard. Keep in mind that the perception of others is the crucial factor in the battle for legitimacy. Consider Secretary of State Powell's presentation to the United Nations, exposing Iraq's noncompliance with disarmament resolutions. Air Force satellite photos and RC-135 telephone intercepts detailed that nation's obfuscation of the inspection process. This information was then exploited on the world stage, discrediting Iraq and bolstering the American stance on the issue.

2. Precision. Another capability of airpower that supports U.S. legitimacy is precision lethality, the ability to destroy key targets with minimal collateral damage. Collateral damage can cripple American legitimacy; spurring our enemies to be even more committed, undermining support among our population at home, encouraging new recruits to the terrorist cause, and swaying those

neutral to the conflict to be more sympathetic to the enemy. In fact, a common tactic of insurgents is to provoke governments to overstep with excessively violent responses, thereby destroying governmental legitimacy.<sup>29</sup>

3. Mass. Airpower's global reach and ability to concentrate massive firepower enhances legitimacy by allowing smaller forces to achieve great results. Absent this capability, enormous ground forces might be necessary more often. The U.S. could more easily be portrayed as an occupying army or colonial power, causing greater resentment in the region. The force-multiplying effect of airpower for the relatively small number of American special operations forces in Afghanistan is a good example of this.

4. Mobility. American intentions are also harder to portray as ominous when mobility forces are employed to bring food, clothing, and medical supplies to indigenous populations. Humanitarian efforts are in this way actual blow to the enemy's center of gravity. Such operations increase legitimacy in the battle for "hearts and minds."

### **Pitfalls: Right Train, Wrong Track?**

The primary trap to avoid in the use of airpower vis-à-vis legitimacy is a mistake in the level of analysis applied to designing the air campaign; in other words, targeting for the wrong strategic effect. If the overarching conflict in which the United States is now involved is indeed a global insurgency, then planners choosing the methods used to prosecute sub-campaigns in the war on terror must take this into account. For example, while designing an air campaign aimed at a nation-state's centers of gravity, they must also consider the parent-conflict's battle for legitimacy. An initial target list may include a power plant vital to a city's operation—certainly a good choice at one level of analysis. Further examination, however, may deem the destruction of said target as undermining the legitimacy of American intentions by creating inordinate human suffering (or, just as important, the *perception* of such suffering). Though useful in the immediate campaign, the target would be counterproductive to the strategic goals of the War on Terror.

The true desired strategic effect is to increase American legitimacy while destroying that of our enemy, Al Qaeda and its supporters. During the Vietnam War, an interview with an American infantryman after his unit had set a collection of huts ablaze recorded the infamous quote, "We had to destroy the village in order to save it." In the complex and politically charged world of counterinsurgency (especially on a global scale), such muddled thinking can develop more easily than one would like to acknowledge. U.S. planners must be capable of a certain "dual level thinking"—target X may be sound tactically or operationally, but what will be the true strategic (political) effect of its destruction? This is still Warden's systems warfare, but the system must be properly identified and analyzed in terms of the global insurgency the U.S. is fighting.

None of this is to say that the U.S. military should proceed as if treading on eggshells, fretting at every turn about what the world will think, what others will say. That is a strategy for failure. But neither should America cast aside the effect its operations will have on world

opinion. Rather, the United States should give due consideration to how its actions effect legitimacy, rightly understood. It need not forgo military operation when it sees the need, but rather tailor them to ensure they are in line with the overarching strategic objectives of the War on Terror.

### **Iraq: Initial Observations**

Naysayers during the opening stages of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM abounded. Assuming that "shock and awe" meant "just like 1991, only better," these doubters quickly became frustrated with what appeared to be a slow start to the air campaign. Missing were many of the types of attacks seen in DESERT STORM. Power stations, communications, infrastructure, and fielded forces had not been targeted as they had been previously. As U.S. ground forces neared Baghdad and resistance built, many were frustrated that airpower had not yet been unleashed in full. Airpower, they said, could save U.S. lives, if allowed. Politics was getting in the way, they concluded.<sup>30</sup>

But they misunderstood the nature of the campaign as part of the War on Terror. If, in fact, American troops were assuming additional risk as a result of the attempt to attack only Saddam's regime while leaving the populace and infrastructure in tact, such risk was not the result of mere political faintheartedness or a desire to be politically correct. To the contrary, it appears the design of this campaign was fully integrated with U.S. strategic objectives. Coalition forces were pursuing two goals simultaneously—the defeat and disarmament of Saddam Hussein's regime *and* the overarching legitimacy of U.S. policy and actions in the War on Terror.

Airpower was just the tool to do it. From the amazing flexibility of the opening air strike against Hussein himself, U.S. airpower decimated the Ba'athist party's infrastructure, leadership, communications, troops, and will to fight with virtual impunity. Despite the effort to disperse these targets throughout the population centers, collateral damage was incredibly low. Airpower brought not only fierce destructive power to the regime, but humanitarian aid and real world information to the people of Iraq. U.S. and civilian losses were much lower than anyone could have projected.

What hath wise airpower wrought? It is too early to tell for sure, but initial feedback is encouraging. The world was shocked at the actual horror of life inside the regime. Arab neighbors had little idea of what was happening on their doorstep. Respect for U.S. commitment to the region is spurring talk of increased optimism for headway in the Israeli-Palestinian situation. France, Russia, and Germany are seeking a chance to work with the coalition partners in Iraq. The Iraqi people are not only free, but understand they were not the target of U.S. military actions. Most importantly, Al Qaeda has one less sympathetic regime from which to draw support.

### **Conclusion**

The Al Qaeda network, centerpiece in the War on Terror, is a worldwide movement dedicated to the vision of a pan-national, pure Islamist group of states, free from Western influence in the Middle Eastern region. Its organization, unconventional use of violence,

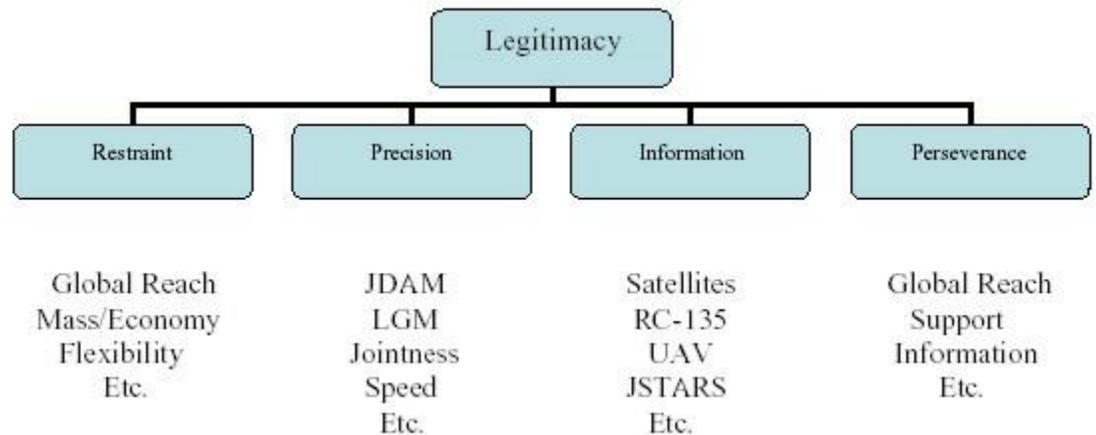
ideological motives, and political goals bear remarkable likeness to an insurgency, but on a global scale. The U.S. military has well-developed doctrine to aid the strategist in understanding insurgency and countering it.

Air Force Pamphlet 3-20, "Military Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict," Air Force Doctrine Document 2-3, "Military Operations Other Than War," and Air Force Doctrine Document 2-3.1, "Foreign Internal Defense," each remind the reader of central themes when waging a counterinsurgency. First, such operations are highly political in nature, and the political context of the struggle will permeate it from strategy to tactics. Second, the primary objective for each side is to build its own legitimacy in the eyes of the populace and neutral observers, while destroying the enemy's.

As is evident from operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, aerospace power strategists must view operations in the War on Terror not as isolated military campaigns, but on two levels. The first is the local objective at hand (e.g., disarming Iraq). The second is the overarching battle for legitimacy in the counterinsurgency against Al Qaeda. This overarching objective will and *should* alter how the sub-objectives are prosecuted.

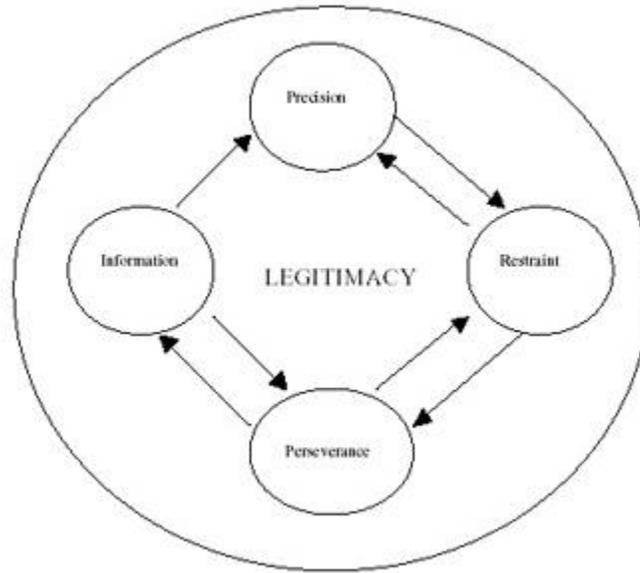
The highly political context of a war of insurgency is difficult when confined to a nation's internal struggle. Applied on a global scale, the problems are compounded. Yet U.S. aerospace power, applied correctly, has enormous capacity to greatly aid in decimating Al Qaeda. What is required of airmen is not a longing for isolation from the political context, but an understanding and acceptance of the integral role political considerations must play.

#### Aerospace Contributors to Legitimacy




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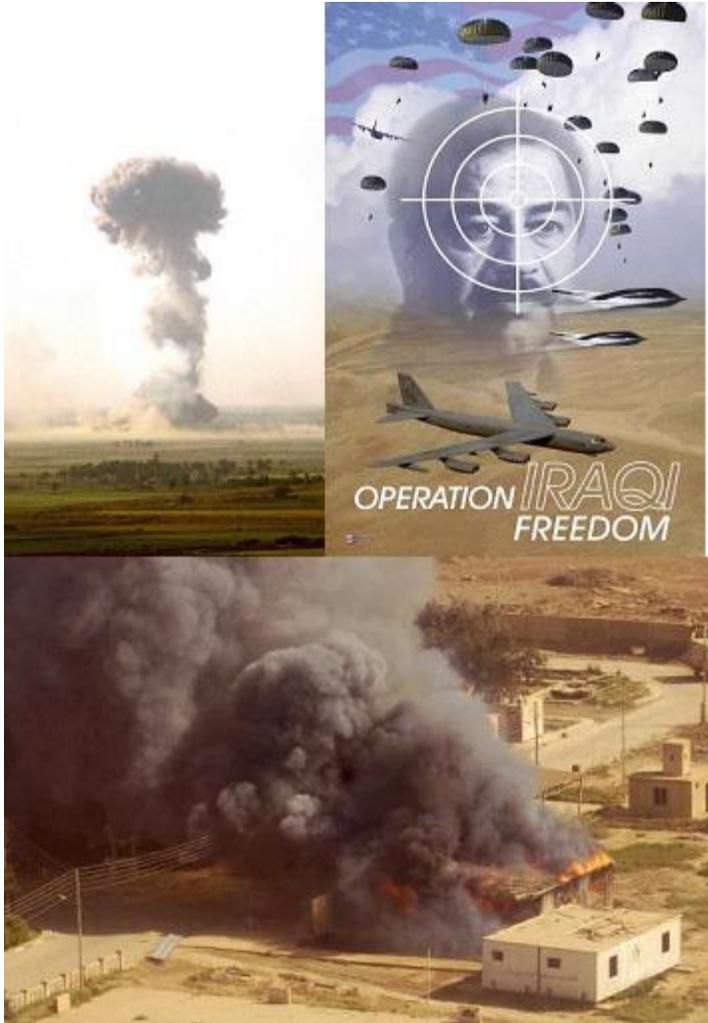
Legitimacy: Insurgency Center of Gravity



All from Defense Visual Information

Precision

Information



Precision



Support of populace



Airlifting food to Iraqi citizens strikes at a key center of gravity as much as a B-2 destroying a regime leadership target.



Aerospace power can greatly aid the U.S. in the global battle for legitimacy. (State Dept.)

COL: Captain Ibrahim?  
CAPT: I am with you, Sir.  
COL: Remove.  
CAPT: Remove. [Repeats instructions]  
COL: The expression.  
CAPT: The expression.  
COL: "Nerve agents."



Notes

1. Garamone, Jim, "Combat Operation Near Spin Boldak Continues," American Forces Press Service, January 29, 2003.
2. Chaliand, *Guerilla Strategies: An Historical Anthology, from the Lon March to Afghanistan*, Berkley: University of California Press, 1982, p.12-13.
3. Ibid, p. 1.
14. Clodfelter, Maj Mark, "Of Demons, Storms, and Thunder: A Preliminary Look at Vietnam's Impact on the Persian Gulf Air Campaign," *ASPJ*, Vol. V, No. 4, (Winter 1991): 17-32.
5. Biddle, Stephen, "War Aims and War Termination," in "Defeating Terrorism: Strategic Issues and Analysis," Col John R. Martin, Ed., Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, January 2002, p. 8.
6. See [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov).
7. See [www.adl.org/terrorism](http://www.adl.org/terrorism).
18. Al-Jazeera broadcast, 26 Dec 2001, quoted at [www.adl.org/terrorism](http://www.adl.org/terrorism).
9. In 1998 bin Laden announced the establishment of "The International Islamic Front for Holy War Against Jews and Crusaders," an umbrella organization linking Islamic extremists in scores of countries around the world, including Egypt, Bangladesh and Pakistan. The group issued a religious edict upon its establishment. [www.adl.org/terrorism](http://www.adl.org/terrorism).
10. Bin Laden has cited US withdrawal from Mogadishu after the killing of several US soldiers there as proof of America's weak will. See Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.* New York: Free Press, 2001.
111. International Policy Institute for Counter Terrorism, see [www.ict.org](http://www.ict.org).
112. Rumsfeld, Donald H., "A New Kind of War," *New York Times*, September 27, 2001.
113. *Air Force Doctrine Document 2-3: Military Operations Other Than War*, Department of the Air Force, July 3, 2000, p. 1.
114. Ibid, p. 3.
115. Ibid, p. 7.
116. Ibid, p. 8.
117. Ibid, p. 9.
118. Ibid.

119. Ibid, p. 10.

120. *Air Force Doctrine Document 2-3.1: Foreign Internal Defense*, Department of the Air Force, February 28, 1998, p. 65.

121. Ibid, p. 65-68.

122. AFDD 2-3, p. 4-10, AFDD 2-3.1, p. 68-70, AFP 3-20, chapter 2.

123. Warden, Col John A., III. "The Enemy as a System," *ASPJ*, No. 1 (Spring 1995): 40-55.

124. Warden, "Terrorists Are More Vulnerable Than Most Realize," *USA Today*, October 9, 2001.

125. To be fair, Col. Warden wrote this short piece for USA Today mere days after the start of offensive actions in Afghanistan.

126. Walker, Maj Scott, "A Unified Field Theory of Coercive Airpower" *ASPJ*, Vol XI, No. 2 (Summer 1997): 70-79.

127. *Air Force Pamphlet 3-20: Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict*, HQ, Departments of the Army and Air Force, Washington, D. C., December 5, 1990, p. 30.

128. Ibid, p. 36.

129. Chaliand, p.16.

130. Active duty aircrew conversation at a CONUS US Air Force Base, Base Operations, 28 March, 2003.

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