The Cold War and the Long War:
Different Approaches to
Global Ideological Movements

by

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To kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do.

1998 World Islamic Front Fatwa[1]

Introduction

Osama bin Laden represents the public face of an outwardly violent Islamic movement whose intent is to implement Sharia law to replace secular forms of governments and institutions.[2] Nikita Khrushchev was the public face of an inwardly violent communist movement whose intent was to replace the world's capitalistic economic system.[3] Neither of these leaders began these movements, but both assumed key leadership posts that allowed them to greatly advance a global ideological movement. These global movements, which pit capitalism against communism and secularism against Islamism, have been referred to as the "Cold War" and the "Long War," respectively.

The Cold War/Long War analogy is, for the most part, appropriate, but it is important to understand that they are significantly different in two key ways: the motivations of the actors and the technologies available. This essay will first examine the defining characteristics of the Cold and Long wars to offer a better understanding of the significant similarities and differences between them. The implications of this analysis will then be examined to draw some policy conclusions on how the United States can approach the Long War, followed by a discussion of organizational changes that may be necessary within the U.S. national security apparatus to implement these policy recommendations.

Defining Characteristics

As we saw it, Soviet ideology took seriously the Marxist/Leninist view that Communist socialism was destined, eventually, to triumph everywhere and that it was their duty to assist that historic process. Thus, as we saw it, the contest was not one of competition over specific national interests; it had an absolute ideological quality about it.

Paul Nitze[4]

Comparisons between the global ideological struggles of capitalism against communism and secularism against Islamism are, to a very large extent, justifiable. However, as with all comparisons, one must be very careful to understand where the similarities and differences exist so that we can then begin to transfer lessons from one conflict to another. The following analysis, across five defining characteristics, will drive the discussion of how the United States can best approach the Long War.

Similarities

Global Struggles. Both the Cold War and the Long War have been defined as global struggles—not by the United States but by the Soviet Union and the violent Islamists. Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, author of the "Global Islamic Resistance Call," clearly lays out the global nature of the war between secularism and Islamism.[5]

Ideology as the Centerpiece. Both the Soviet Union and the violent Islamists were/are pursuing their strategies to achieve ideological ends; their struggles are less about the land or resources that normally define international competition. The ideological fervor of their causes makes the information instruments of power crucial to both wars.

Instruments of Power. The Cold War ideological struggle centered on different economic systems, thereby propelling the economic and information instruments of power to the forefront. While many believe that National Security Council (NSC) Report 68, "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security" (April 1950), militarized containment, in the end its purpose was to buy time for capitalism to triumph.[6] Similarly, the Long War ideological struggle is centered on governmental systems, secularism against Islamism. While the use of the military and diplomatic instruments of power is similar to that of the Cold War, the use of law enforcement capabilities is a difference that cannot be overlooked.

Differences

Motivations of the Actors. The Cold War set two powerful nation-states against each other; both preferred indirect conflict to avoid blowing up the world. The Long War is very different in that the United States is facing a variety of individuals, non-state actors and rogue states whose motivations are violent, unpredictable and apocalyptic.[7]

Technology Available. The Cold War was fought during the industrial era by two industrialized societies competing against each other in an economic and ideological war with radio stations, copy machines and complicated weapons of mass destruction. The Long War is the first information-era global war. Those wishing to use violence to further their political goals are able to use the information backbone within the United States as their command and control system (they often use e-mail, cell phones, and chat rooms that are routed through the United States), the global transportation system to deliver weapons, and the Internet to easily access information to produce weapons of mass destruction (the genetic sequence for deadly pathogens is easily available online).[8]

Implications and Approaches

[D]uring numerous public appearances since September 11, 2001, I have asked audiences for a show of hands as to how many would support the use of nonlethal torture in a ticking-bomb case. Virtually every hand is raised.

Alan Dershowitz[9]

The implications of the similarities and differences between the two wars are very important in providing insights as to how the United States can adjust its approach to the Long War. This section will examine the implications across several different dimensions and, for each, provide observations for different strategic policy recommendations.

Strategic Alliances. As previously stated, both the Cold and Long wars are global struggles, so one would anticipate a similar policy toward alliances. For the Cold War, the United States forged global security and economic alliances such as the United Nations, NATO and the World Bank. The preservation of the alliance was often more important than any individual differences among the members. Actions taken early in the Long War—such as forming coalitions of the willing, embracing a doctrine of preemption and rejecting the Kyoto accords—signaled to many that the United States no longer valued permanent alliances. This hurt U.S. credibility and legitimacy in the global struggle. While current actions by the United States, such as embracing international climate change goals and embracing NATO efforts in Afghanistan, are now attempting to repair this damage, much work remains. "Coalitions of the willing" are not alliances, and rebuilding permanent alliances must be paramount. One way to do this would be for the United States to propose the creation of a new multilateral organization that would be focused on governance reform. This organization would be similar to the World Bank (whose focus is on reconstruction) and the International Monetary Fund (whose focus is on financial systems). This new "good governance" organization would provide a multilateral solution to rebuilding failed states.

Resourcing the Information Instrument of Power. Since the Long War is an ideological struggle, the United States should improve upon those "soft power" capabilities that won the Cold War. As Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates recently stated, we dismantled our ability to use nonmilitary instruments of power during the 1990s by gutting the United States Information Agency (abolished as an independent agency and split into pieces) and the United States Agency for International Development (reduced in size from 15,000 personnel during the Vietnam War to only a few thousand today).[10] This lack of "soft power" capability has reduced America's ability to influence the ideological struggle and also aided and abetted the enemy's propaganda as we are unable to translate military victory into reconstruction and stabilization. Simply put, we are losing the information war. We must immediately resource the capabilities of these two critical governmental agencies, as well as invest resources in nongovernmental organizations that support them. Similarly, the Army must dedicate permanent force structure to these tasks to institutionalize current ad-hoc capabilities such as Provincial Reconstruction Teams, Military Transition Teams and the National Guard's Agri-Business Development Team.

Technology and the Constitution. One of the greatest differences between the two wars is that the Long War is being fought in the information age. The violent Islamists are able to use the domestic U.S. information infrastructure as their command and control system and to use the global transportation system to move about freely. As a result, a major conflict exists between two sections of the Constitution: the power of the President as the Commander in Chief and the right to privacy of individual citizens. Had the Soviet Union sent paratroopers into Nebraska,

one surely would not have assumed that the military would need search warrants to intercept the enemy soldiers' communications or arrest warrants to detain the paratroopers. As was previously stated, the violent jihadists who operate overseas use web servers, cell phones, chat rooms and e-mail systems inside the United States. Similarly, enemy combatants such as the 9/11 hijackers move freely within our borders. Dealing with this has been politically divisive, to the detriment of fighting this global struggle, both domestically and internationally. The United States must forge a bipartisan solution to these constitutional conflicts both to protect the privacy of citizens and to defeat the violent Islamists. This is a political challenge, not a technological one; however, any solution must protect the ability of the military to collect battlefield intelligence on enemy forces without having to apply for a warrant from a federal judge.

Ethics for Fighting Those Who Do Not Value Life. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union fought with "gentlemen's" rules, meaning that murders such as that of Major Arthur Nicholson in East Berlin in 1985 were rare.[11] The violent jihadists are different in that they believe in suicide bombings, mass murder and killing civilians.[12] Therefore, the United States is confronted with the proverbial "ticking bomb syndrome" that, as Alan Dershowitz points out, appears to muddle the ethical middle. The U.S. detention at Guantánamo Bay of captured jihadists has created a similar ethical dilemma. Indefinite detention and the use of torture have become counterproductive for the United States both domestically and internationally. As Alistair Horne clearly documents in his historical analysis of the French experience in Algeria, torture is ineffective in gathering intelligence, psychologically damaging to the inflicter, incompatible with democratic societies and counterproductive to actually winning wars.[13] A new bipartisan approach to detention and interrogation—perhaps under the auspices of an international forum—must be found. This also means that the Army must dedicate force structure, training and resources to the detainee mission; never again can it go to war unprepared for this. Finally, it is conceivable that as a nation, we will have different sets of interrogation and detention standards for law enforcement, for the military and for our intelligence services.

Organizational Change

> [NSC-68 was created] to so bludgeon the mass mind of "top government" that not only could the President make a decision, but that the decision could be carried out.
>
> Dean Acheson[14]

Before the national security organizational changes necessary for the effective prosecution of the Long War can be determined, it is important to understand the structure as it exists today. The current structure is based upon three pieces of legislation: *The National Security Act of 1947*, which established the National Security Council and the Department of Defense to integrate the military departments; *The Homeland Security Act of 2002,* which established the Homeland Security Council and the Department of Homeland Security to integrate 22 different organizations; and *The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004,* which established the Director of National Intelligence to integrate the 16 intelligence agencies. These acts served to integrate disparate pieces of the government to achieve greater operational synergies. What is missing is the operational integration of these departments.

The global ideological struggle against violent Islamism will require the United States to integrate law enforcement, military, intelligence, economic reconstruction, diplomacy, information operations and other instruments of national power against a violent ideological movement that is designed as an agile, independent network of cells. In much simpler times,

a National Security Council memo such as NSC 68 might have been able to "bludgeon" the bureaucracy, but the enemy is now too fast. What is needed is an organization—a National Operations Center—that sits atop the Cabinet Departments but below the policymaking apparatus of the White House to integrate operations and intelligence functions for the United States, both domestically and internationally. Two successful examples of this type of structure exist today: the Director of National Intelligence, who sits atop 16 organizations that he does not "own," and the National Counterterrorism Center, which serves as the United States' integrated operations and intelligence center for counterterrorism. This recommendation goes a step beyond creating the "super-empowered National Security Council" that many propose and would allow the National Security Council to remain a policymaking body rather than a coordinator of operational missions. The National Operations Center would be the interagency coordination center responsible for implementing the policy decisions of the National Security Council.

Conclusion

The United States has struggled to develop a coherent approach to the Long War, a war that traces its present-day roots back to the July 1968 hijacking of an El Al flight from Rome to Tel Aviv.[15] As has been discussed, the Long War is both similar and dissimilar to the Cold War. Both are global, ideological struggles that require the United States to globally integrate its instruments of national power. However, they are different because of the use of extreme violence and the technological revolution brought about by the information age. In many ways, the United States' current approach to the Long War does not recognize the implications of the analogy between the Cold and Long wars, causing major strategic, political, resource, constitutional and ethical issues to emerge. However, the Long War will not soon end, so there is a window of opportunity for the United States to adjust. By refocusing on global alliances, rebuilding the information instrument of power, institutionalizing certain counterinsurgency capabilities within the U.S. Army, addressing the constitutional conflicts between security and privacy, and seeking an international consensus on interrogation and detention policies, the United States can strengthen its credibility, legitimacy and influence abroad. Finally, the formation of a National Operations Center with the power to direct Cabinet-level operations will provide the United States with a force multiplier that will amplify the heretofore uncoordinated instruments of national power.

There is little doubt that in the Long War between secularism and violent Islamism, the latter will be defeated; the violent Islamic ideology is simply not a viable model of governance. However, the struggle has been and will continue to be costly. The violent Islamists—much like the communists in Stalin's Russia, the Khmer Rouge's Cambodia and Mao's China—can kill tens of millions of people and cause massive destruction. By adopting the recommendations of this paper, the United States and its partners can reduce the timetable for the destruction of this ideology and perhaps save millions of lives in the process.

Endnotes

1   Bernard Lewis, "License to Kill. Usama Bin Ladin's Declaration of Jihad," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 6, November/December 1998), pp. 14–19, http://www.foreignaffairs.org/19981101facomment1428/bernard-lewis/license-to-kill-usama-bin-ladin-s-declaration-of-jihad.html.

2   William McCants et al., *Militant Ideology Atlas: Research Compendium* (West Point, N.Y.: Combatting Terrorism Center, 2006), p. 6, http://www.ctc.usma.edu/atlas/Atlas-ResearchCompendium.pdf.

3   Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, *For Victory in Peaceful Competition with Capitalism, with a Special Introduction Written for the American Edition* (New York: Dutton, 1960), p. 783. In 1959, talking about Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, Khrushchev stated, "We can't expect the American People to jump from Capitalism to Communism, but we can assist their elected leaders in giving them small doses of Socialism, until they awaken one day to find that they have Communism."

4   S. Nelson Drew, editor, *NSC-68: Forging the Strategy of Containment, with Analyses by Paul H. Nitze* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 1994), p. 137, http://www.ndu.edu/inss/books/Books_1996/NSC%2068%20-%20Oct%2096/NSC68.pdf.

5   "The Brains Behind the Bombs," *Economist* 385, no. 8553, 1 November 2007), pp. 98–100, http://www.economist.com/books/displaystory.cfm?story_id=10059748.

6   National Security Report 68, "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security: A Report to the President Pursuant to the President's Directive of January 31, 1950," April 14, 1950, http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/korea/large/week2/nsc68_3.htm.

7   David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 259.

8   Paul Boutin, *Biowar for Dummies,* Originally published on Paul Boutin blog February 22, 2006; reprinted with permission on KurzweilAI.net July 11, 2006, http://www.kurzweilai.net/meme/frame.html?main=/articles/art0682.html.

9   Alan M. Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works: Understanding the Threat, Responding to the Challenge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 150.

10   Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, Landon Lecture Remarks as Delivered, Manhattan, Kansas, Monday, November 26, 2007, http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1199.

11   Major Arthur D. Nicholson was a U.S. Army Officer serving overtly in East Berlin as part of the United States Military Mission. On 25 March 1985, Major Nicholson was conducting a routine overt tour to photograph a Soviet tank unit in East Berlin when he was shot by a Soviet sentry who was hidden in the woods. Over the next several hours, the Soviets secured the area but did not render first aid. Major Nicholson died at the site of the shooting within three hours. More details can be found at http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/nicholsn.htm.

12   Use of chlorine bombs in Iraq appears to be a crude attempt to produce chemical weapons. Many therefore believe that the violent jihadists would use weapons of mass destruction to accomplish their strategic aims.

13   Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954–1962* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1977), pp. 203–207.

14   Drew, *NSC-68: Forging the Strategy of Containment*, p. 3.

15   Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), p. 138.

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