

## Viewpoint: Whither Victory in the War on Terror?

*Predicting how long America's 'Long War' will last depends on how you define 'victory' for the GWOT*

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Some days, it seems like our last global struggle has only just ended. That one, the Cold War, carried us all the way from the end of World War II to the sudden collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989 (and the breakup of the Soviet Union itself two years later.) The West's swift and largely unexpected victory left many Cold War planners, who were prepared to sustain a multi-pronged strategy of containment for generations to come, wondering how they had failed to predict such a clear and decisive victory was just around the bend. Some critics of our half-century long struggle against Soviet communism believed the Cold War was designed to be self-perpetuating, a war without end: yet the democratic transformation that made Europe 'whole and free' proved otherwise.

Today, things seem eerily familiar. We find ourselves just over five years into our next global struggle, in what is formally known as the Global War on Terror (GWOT). Inside the beltway, this global struggle is widely known as the 'Long War.' But just how long the Long War will last remains a subject of much debate—and what victory will look like, and when to expect it, remains a mystery. Some critics of the Long War, like their counterparts during the Cold War, question its open-ended nature, and suggest it has been designed by war planners to go on and on without victory. Other critics of the Long War believe that we've already won, and only need to declare our victory—making it more of a short war than a long, generational struggle.

### **A Battle of Ideas**

But the architects of the Long War believe we're in for a long struggle, a global clash of ideas and arms that's reminiscent of the Cold War. This past September, the White House updated its strategic vision for this war in its *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, which articulates several broad objectives, and presents a multi-pronged strategy to achieve these goals reminiscent of the containment strategy that defined our game plan during the Cold War. The updated *National Strategy* explains that "from the beginning, it has been both a battle of arms and a battle of ideas. Not only do we fight our terrorist enemies on the battlefield, we promote freedom and human dignity as alternatives to the terrorists' perverse vision of oppression and totalitarian rule." To defeat the "global terrorist movement" America must thus "confront the radical ideology that justifies the use of violence against innocents in the name of religion." The *National Strategy* presents the Administration's view that through America's "'freedom agenda', we also have promoted the best long-term answer to al-Qaeda's agenda: the freedom and dignity that comes when human liberty is protected by effective democratic institutions," as "effective democracies

honor and uphold basic human rights, including freedom of religion, conscience, speech, assembly, association, and press,” and are thus “the long-term antidote to the ideology of terrorism today.”

As Mackenzie Eaglen, a senior policy analyst for national security at the Washington, D.C.-based Heritage Foundation, explained, “Winning the war on terrorism is primarily centered upon winning the struggle of ideas” and “such an effort requires: 1. understanding the enemy, 2. de-legitimizing its view of the world, 3. offering a credible alternative, and 4. demonstrating resolve, or the will to prevail.” However, adding complexity to our effort to understand our new enemy, Eaglen noted, “there is no singular enemy in the war on terrorism”—as “various terrorist networks pose different kinds of local, regional, and global threats.” She observed that “the distinct threats posed by different terrorist groups require a differentiated U.S. policy custom-made for each group, not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach,” as “many different terrorist networks are at work around the world, including terrorist groups in the Indian sub-continent, which have carried out attacks in India and Pakistan, and Hezbollah, which has killed hundreds of Americans and struck in Europe and Latin America as well as in the Middle East.”

But in America's favor, Eaglen observed that “many Muslims reject terrorism, even in countries where the official rhetoric comes across as warlike,” and that “many Islamic scholars argue that terrorism—the intentional murder of innocents to achieve political goals—is completely illegitimate.” However, these voices are not always heard: “in some cases, moderate voices receive little notice in Western media,” while “in other instances, individuals are fearful to speak out too loudly because of the threat from terrorists and their supporters.” To help achieve victory in the Long War, Eaglen believes that the United States “should encourage Muslim political, religious, and social leaders to denounce terrorism and cooperate in defeating terrorist groups.”

## Rapid Structural Transformation for the Long War

Winning the Long War will require more than ideas: it will also require new structures and institutions designed to confront the new threat. As explained in the updated *National Strategy*, the Cold War benefited from “an array of domestic and international institutions as well as enduring partnerships to defeat the threat of communism,” and “today we require similar structures to win the long war on terror.” As a consequence, the *National Strategy* observes that “we are transforming our domestic and international institutions and enduring partnerships to carry forward the long term fight against terror and to help ensure our ultimate success” through the establishment of “international standards of accountability;” the strengthening of our “coalitions and partnerships to maintain a united front against terror;” the enhancement of “our counterterrorism architecture and interagency collaboration by setting national priorities and transforming the government to achieve those priorities;” and “fostering intellectual and human capital by creating an expert community of counterterrorism professionals and developing a domestic culture of preparedness.”

As Heritage Foundation's Eaglen explained, “Winning this kind of war will require vast resources beyond military resources.” She recalled how the United States “has often used its warfighting military structures, which are not really well suited to post-conflict operations, and tried repeatedly to adapt them,” adding that “often times, the U.S. learns the same lesson again that our forces that fought so well in battle are not well equipped, trained, and organized to win the peace or using the military for peace may create as many problems as it solves.” She believes that “victory in the war on terrorism requires a total U.S. government response, from the Department of State to USAID to Treasury to Agriculture.” Or, as the *National Strategy* explains, victory in the Long War will only be achieved through the “application of all elements of our national power and influence”—including not just military power, but also “diplomatic, financial, intelligence, and law enforcement activities to protect the homeland and extend our defenses, disrupt terrorist operations, and deprive our enemies of what they need to operate and survive.”

## Victory over Terror: Now... or Never?

In contrast to those who view the GWOT as a protracted, generational conflict like the Cold War, there are analysts who take a contrarian view to when we can expect victory. Among these critics of the Long War concept are optimists like James Fallows, the national correspondent for *The Atlantic Monthly*. Around the same time that the White House released its updated *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, Fallows published an article in the September 2006 edition of *The Atlantic Monthly* titled "Declaring Victory" in which he argue that "the time has come to declare the war on terror over, so that an even more effective military and diplomatic campaign can begin."

In an interview on *National Public Radio* on August 20, 2006, Fallows told host Liane Hansen that "al-Qaeda central itself...has in fact been weakened to a serious degree. And it's unlikely that they'll be able to pull off anything like the catastrophic acts of five years ago." Fallows believes "the real harm terrorism does to a society is not so much the direct damage, even when that is extreme, as it was in 9/11; it's the reaction that it provokes," as terrorists aim to "provoke a target society into doing something that is self-destructive in the longer term." Fallows thus believes "the most effective way to deal with them in the long-term might be, in fact, to move out of the open-ended state of war and to pursue other avenues against them."

Other critics believe that the Long War is designed to be self-perpetuating, and thus to be a war without end, and thus without victory. Dr. Wade Huntley, the director of the Simons Centre for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Research at the Liu Institute for Global Issues at the University of British Columbia, explained the GWOT is in fact a "politically manipulated Orwellian fraud" that "sustains support across the political spectrum (and so also in major media) only because it has spawned a cottage industry of 'homeland security' analysts, consultants and think tanks who now prey on public anxiety and suck at the teat of government money." According Huntley, the question of how to define victory is thus "moot."

Where ever you lay on the spectrum of victory, the United States is digging in for a long, hard fight: and at the end of its Long War, it fully expects to be victorious. As Juan C. Zarate , the Deputy National Security Advisor for Combating Terrorism told an online *Ask the Whitehouse* forum following the release of the updated *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, "Not only do I believe we can win the war on terror, but I know we will. Just like the Cold War, this will be a long, protracted battle of arms and ideas that will require real commitment from the American public and our friends and allies around the world. I think we will indeed look back some day and see that these were the formative years in the battle, which is why the President has forced important institutional changes, like the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, the Director of National Intelligence, and the National Counter Terrorism Center, to allow us to fight this war for the long term."

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