FROM STRATEGY TO TACTICS
The United States’ Counterterrorism Towards al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in 2004-2011

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION........................................................................................................................................... 3

Research Questions, Sources and Methods................................................................................................. 3

Historical Background.................................................................................................................................... 7

1 WAR ON TERROR: CASE AL-QAEDA....................................................................................................... 9

1.1 Loss of the Sense of Security............................................................................................................... 9

1.2 Al-Qaeda Ideology and Ways of Warfare............................................................................................... 12

2 THE CONFLICT......................................................................................................................................... 16

2.1 Counterterrorism as War....................................................................................................................... 16

2.2 Ending the Conflict............................................................................................................................... 18

3 A NEVER-ENDING CYCLE OF VIOLENCE.......................................................................................... 22

3.1 Same Conflict – Different Battlefield.................................................................................................. 22

3.2 Critique and Opposition....................................................................................................................... 24

3.3 The Future of Afghanistan.................................................................................................................... 27

CONCLUSION.............................................................................................................................................. 29

SOURCES................................................................................................................................................. 31
INTRODUCTION

Research Questions, Sources and Methods

Jihad will continue even if I am not around.
-Osama bin Laden, 2001¹

Terrorism frightens and fascinates people around the world. Not a day goes by that there are not any terrorism-related articles in the Finnish media. It is contradictory that specifically media is the main tool for terrorists to create a false illusion of a united front, and despite this, people thirst for news about these illusions and fears. The blood of the victims of terrorists is real, the persecution and despair around the world is real, but the fear created by the illusion is a product of human imagination. This same fear and fascination is what indeed inspired me to carry out this research.

The quote by Osama bin Laden seems to catch the very essence of all kinds of terrorism: it does not depend on individuals or even on an ideology or religion. Terrorism is a reflection of anxiety in a society and therefore, it changes its form from time and place but it never ceases to exist. Terrorism cannot be examined in a time or space vacuum – it should be viewed through the social context of its time and place.

The newest trend in the history of terrorism is the war between the United States and the “axis of evil”.² The War on Terror (WOT) refers to the ongoing military campaign to battle terrorism worldwide, a campaign started by the George W. Bush administration after the 9/11 attacks on the United States in 2001. The War on Terror is now led by the US, UK and their allies against everyone identified as terrorist. However, what should be kept in mind is that the War on Terror excludes other independent counterterrorism campaigns and operations such as those by Russia and India.

Why has this particular counterterrorism mission led to an international conflict? How come neither of the sides seems to be winning the War on Terror? From the viewpoint of these questions, I examine the counterterrorism policies and practices that the United States has aimed at al-Qaeda since the beginning of the War on Terror. I examine how, why and for what purposes has the war been fought on behalf of the United States and

¹ The Telegraph 02.05.2011.
² A term established by George W. Bush to describe the enemies of the United States.
why they have chosen the strategic turns that they have. In addition to this, I assess what are the main differences of the warfare and ideology of al-Qaeda and the United States and whether there is something about this particular enemy that has required an armed conflict and does the US-strategy somehow contribute to the inability to end the War on Terror. Thematically formed chapters examine these questions starting from the rise of terrorism, al-Qaeda ideology and counterterrorism as war, continuing to examine the actual conflict and its possible outcomes.

The fight against terrorism is not synonymous with combating al-Qaeda or other extremist Islamist groups. There is neither academic nor accurate legal consensus in defining terrorism. Terrorism, in its broadest sense, is any act designed to cause terror, and in the narrowest sense, terrorism can be understood as a political agenda. Terrorism is practiced to further one’s objectives and it is usually seen as a tool of religious and nationalist groups, revolutionaries, right- and left-wing political parties, and ruling governments. Worth noticing is that many of the most troublesome ideas and acts of terrorism are not restricted to extremist groups.3

Nevertheless, it is difficult to research terrorism without at least attempting to define it more clearly. Are there differences between guerrilla warfare and terrorism? Does terrorism include all kidnappings and killings of political leaders? Can the term terrorist be applied to a nation’s own citizens, as in the Stalin’s cold-blooded purges in the Soviet Union? A revolutionary, a freedom fighter, a martyr or an ordinary criminal – is there actually a difference?4 There are many different academic opinions of what terrorism actually is, and therefore, through this research I aim to get a clearer understanding of the definition of terrorism.

Plenty of extensive research have been conducted on WOT since its beginning in 2001. What is noteworthy is that the majority of it have been done by American scholars. A pattern can be detected from the mentioned research as many of them fail to examine the conflict from the terrorists’ point of view. Despite this, the number of high-quality research on the subject enabled me to examine the War on Terror below the surface.

3 Davis & Jenkins 2001, 5.
4 Shugart 2006, 9.
In order to be able to examine the role of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, it is imperative to explain their relationship and differences between the other important extremists group in the area – the Taliban. Following the 9/11 attacks, the US-led international military intervention in Afghanistan named their target to be the Taliban-al-Qaeda combine. As the immediate result of the intervention was the removing of the Taliban regime, the shift of focus quickly turned solely on to al-Qaeda.\textsuperscript{5} A report by nearly 50 American scholars and policymakers rationales this decision by stating that it is not necessary for the United States to defeat the Taliban, describing it as a movement with local goals that is unlikely to reclaim reign of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{6} In other words, the Taliban was not seen as a direct threat to the United States like al-Qaeda was. The reason that Taliban was also named a target in the invasion was because they refused to give up al-Qaeda terrorists, including their leader Osama bin Laden. There are fundamental connections between the two groups. Al-Qaeda means “the base” in Arabic, and the name refers to their former headquarters in Afghanistan under the Taliban host.\textsuperscript{7}

Despite their common enemies and interests the two groups have not quite seen eye to eye since the beginning of the millennium. An anonymous senior-ranking Taliban commander stated in July 2012 that they consider al-Qaeda to be a plague that was sent down to them from heaven. The commander explains that originally the Taliban were naive and ignorant of politics when they welcomed al-Qaeda into their homes in Afghanistan and that as a result of their actions around 70% of the Taliban despises al-Qaeda. “Al-Qaeda abused our hospitality”, he states.\textsuperscript{8}

Nonetheless, the Taliban is hardly a lesser of two evils. According to the United Nations, 75\% of all Afghan civilian casualties in 2010 were due to the Taliban and their allies. The same percentage in 2011 and 2012 was 80\%.\textsuperscript{9} Despite the higher casualty numbers, I examine the counterterrorism measures aimed specifically at al-Qaeda, as they were seen as the main target by the United States. However, in many occasions I refer to the enemy – the Taliban – but in these cases I am referring to the Taliban as the host of al-Qaeda, not their own activities after their removal from the government. What

\textsuperscript{5} D'Souza 2015, 2.
\textsuperscript{6} Study urges US to scale back Afghan troops 8.9.2010, The Global Intelligence Files. Wikileaks.
\textsuperscript{7} Haynes, 2005, 177.
\textsuperscript{8} ABC News Read 23.3.2016.
is also worth noticing, is that I am writing about al-Qaeda and its threat in a present sense since the organization is nowhere near demolished in 2016.

In addition to al-Qaeda and terrorism, other key terms and concepts used in this research are counterterrorism and counterintelligence. Counterterrorism means the practices, military actions, techniques, and strategies used to combat or prevent terrorism. Counterterrorism includes all the means by which the state can address the threats it identifies from groups classified as terrorists. Counterintelligence includes information gathering, and activities conducted to protect a state or a group against espionage and other threats.

As my main source, I use carefully selected files from the WikiLeaks *The Global intelligence Files* – email leak. I made the selection of the emails based on their content. The selected emails contained information that could lead to the most fruitful analysis of the WOT. The Global Intelligence Files consist of over five million e-mails from a private Texas-based company, Stratfor, which is specialized in global intelligence, and is also known as the “shadow CIA”. The e-mails reveal the inner workings of the company as they have provided confidential intelligence to large corporations and governmental agencies, including the US Department of Homeland Security, the US Marines and the US Defence Intelligence Agency. The e-mails date between July 2004 and December 2011, and therefore I have chosen to limit this research according to that timeline to examine the US counterterrorism policies and practices towards al-Qaeda between 2004 and 2011.

The most central research strategies used in this research are the discourse strategy and the cross sectional strategy. The discourse strategy aims to examine the meaning that is created in the interaction between people. The basic idea of the strategy is that the examined objective or phenomenon might get different meanings in different situations, and the goal is to analyze and explain these meanings. In this case it means analyzing how the WikiLeaks emails reflect the development of information and thus the conflict itself. The cross sectional strategy is not primarily interested in change, but how certain

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10 McIntosh 2014, 30.
11 McIntosh 2014, 30.
proceedings occurs in the selected time, in this case the counterterrorism measures.\textsuperscript{12}

**Historical Background**

When examining the topic of terrorism it is essential to shortly summarize the history of terrorism. As mentioned above, there has not been a consensus of the definition of the term terrorism. In my opinion, terrorism can be traced back to history for as long as it has been written. According to one theory, terrorism first occurred during the Reign of Terror in France in the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century, in the form of intimidation by the government and with systematic use of terror as a policy.\textsuperscript{13} However, there have even been extreme interpretations that Moses, with the indirect mass murder of Egyptian people, including children, was in fact the first terrorist that we know of.\textsuperscript{14} Undeniably he was fighting for freeing his people from evil and doing so by god’s will – reasoning that sounds oddly familiar also in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. All in all, the formation of terrorism and its first occurrence is essentially a matter of interpretation.

The foundations for terrorism were laid in Afghanistan hundreds of years ago. The country is geopolitically located in an important site where various civilizations have interacted and clashed from time to time. Modern Afghanistan’s southern border was first drawn in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century by the colonial government of India’s foreign secretary, thus creating a buffer zone against Russian expansionism on India’s northwest border.\textsuperscript{15} However, the turning point was the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989) that contributed to the rise of Islamist terrorism in many ways. Primarily, it provided needed skills to many non-Afghan militants, in the use of firearms and explosives, which later on helped them to engage in terrorist-related activities. Furthermore, it enabled Osama bin Laden to establish himself as a terrorist entrepreneur. He was able to use his organizational skills to create training camps for newly arrived combatants and to contact Muslims with similar values, thus creating the formation for the al-Qaeda terrorist network. In addition, the Soviet exit left Afghanistan full of money, guns and Arab veterans, providing excellent resources for the creation of Islamist terrorism.\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{center}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{12} "Menetelmäpolkuja humanistille" Koppa, Jyväskylän yliopisto, Read 15.4.2016.
\textsuperscript{13} Encylopedia Britannica. Read 3.3.2016.
\textsuperscript{14} MSNBC 5.12.2014.
\textsuperscript{15} Shugart 2006, 33.
\textsuperscript{16} Shugart 2006, 29.
\end{center}
Afghanistan is a primary example that failure states are exposed to a collapse of power structures, triggering forms of violence, terrorism and even anarchy.  

Al-Qaeda was formally established by Osama bin Laden in 1988. Controversial is that he was in fact encouraged by the United States to go to Afghanistan in the 1980s to fight the Soviet army and to fight a jihad against the leaders in the Muslim-Arab world that he saw as non-Islamic. Afterwards, his focus however expanded to include also the allies of the infidel leaders, particularly the United States. In February 1998, bin Laden encouraged Muslims to kill, not only all Americans, but also all those who are allied with “the helpers of Satan”. Throughout the 1990s, al-Qaeda managed to expand its capacity, networks with various other Islamist groups.

The invasions to Afghanistan in 2001 and to Iraq in 2003 can be seen to have formed the modern foundation of the United States counterterrorism policy, as terrorism noticeably modernized itself in the beginning of the 21st century. This research acknowledges the shift in terrorism methods from the time of the Cold War to post-9/11 world, and therefore strictly focuses on the time of new terrorism that also include the media as a tool of terrorism, social media as a recruiting channel and more transnational terrorist organizations than ever before.

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17 Haynes 2005, 178.
18 Islamic term referring to the religious duty of Muslims to preserve the religion. Also known as the Holy War.
1 WAR ON TERROR: CASE AL-QAEDA

1.1 Loss of the Sense of Security

It is essential to note that terrorism is not created in a vacuum, as in most cases it arises from intergroup conflict.\textsuperscript{20} Samuel Huntington’s main argument in the \textit{Clash of Civilizations} (1996) was that after the end of the Cold War, there would be a new ideological conflict in progress that would replace the long clash between communism and liberal capitalism. According to Huntington, the new conflict would be between the Christian West and the Muslim East, a clash between western democracy and radical Islam. According to Huntington, this was to be seen as the main threat to international peace and stability.\textsuperscript{21} As we now know, he’s prophecy-like work turned out to become somewhat true.

As a foreign enemy successfully attacked the United States in September 2001, the events were quickly seen as a second Pearl Harbor. President Bush rapidly and explicitly labeled the attacks as acts of war. From the very outset of the War on Terror campaign, it was identified by the United States as the only logical response to the terrorist attacks. It was apparent that the threat from al-Qaeda to the United States was immediate, powerful, and wide-ranging.\textsuperscript{22} With almost 3,000 dead corpses laying on the debris that just hours before used to be the World Trade Center, the situation seemed clear: it would only be a matter of time before another tragedy would occur if something was not to be done. The Bush Administration came to a conclusion that only precautionary military force could protect the country from further damage – war was inevitable in their eyes.\textsuperscript{23}

The 9/11 attacks had a tremendous impact on the United States’ sense of safety and security. The last time that the United States had an act of terrorism in their own soil, anything that could be compared to the 9/11 tragedy, was in 1814 when the British burned down the White House. After that Americans seem to have lived in an

\textsuperscript{20} Shugart 2006, 13.
\textsuperscript{21} Huntington 1996, passim.
\textsuperscript{22} McIntosh 2014, 24.
\textsuperscript{23} Cronin 2014, 175.
atmosphere of invulnerability from foreign threat.\textsuperscript{24} It is safe to say that the 9/11 attacks shattered that illusion.

"Creating a climate of fear requires fostering the belief that everyone is a potential target", wrote Shugart (2006) in his article "An analytical history of terrorism, 1945-2000".\textsuperscript{25} Al-Qaeda seems to have succeeded in this as in response to the loss of security after the 9/11, at least 263 United States government organizations had been founded or restructured by the year 2014. By that time, there were also around 1,271 government organizations and over 1,900 private-sector corporations that work on problems related to counterterrorism and homeland security, in over 10,000 locations across the United States. The growth of counterintelligence competence of the United States has been remarkably rapid.\textsuperscript{26}

A Stratfor email (2011) describes the 9/11 attacks:

\begin{quote}
Many people can still vividly recall the sense of fear, uncertainty and helplessness they felt on that September morning. Millions of people watched United Airlines flight 175 smash into the south tower of the World Trade Center on live television… Then they watched in horror as the World Trade Center’s twin towers buckled and collapsed to the ground. It was, by any measure, a stunning, cataclysmic scene, a kind of terrorist theater that transformed millions of television viewers into vicarious victims.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

One might say that al-Qaeda has sparked mixed feelings: anger, fear and loathe but furthermore some sort of twisted respect, as can be noticed in the poetic style of writing. A company researcher sent the email in question to all of the Stratfor’s analysts in order to bring up memories of the tragedy. This might have been an attempt to motivate the analyst team in their counterterrorism work.

As a result of the rise of al-Qaeda, emphasis on international political violence and terrorism has increased tremendously. Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations can operate easier than their predecessors because of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century media, social media

\textsuperscript{24} Haynes 2005, 180.
\textsuperscript{25} Shuggart 2006, 10.
\textsuperscript{26} Cronin 2014, 181.
and cyberterrorism. Recruiting new members from different countries and spreading Muslim ideology and propaganda, especially to Europe and the United States, is now easier than ever, due to Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and even videogame consoles, such as Playstation 4. A Stratfor email, (2010) that was sent to the company’s “Operating System” mailing list by an Arabic expert Basima Sadeq, describes the al-Qaeda members in a sarcastic yet somewhat accurate way: “Al Qaeda members in Iraq, shaving their beards, wearing jeans and pledging allegiance to their caliph by mobile messaging.” Sarcasm aside, an easy access to millions of people around the world opposes a direct feeling of threat to the United States, as also the ICT-skills of terrorists seems to be developing at the same rate as counterterrorism measures. It is only natural that both sides have tried, and still try, to recruit hackers and ICT specialist to their ranks.

The level of support for al-Qaeda in the Muslim world is not precisely known. It is important to note that there has been a divide to Sunni and Shia Muslims since the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632. Today Sunni Muslims account for 87-90% of the Muslim population. Sunni Muslims include both the most peaceful Muslims as the most radical Muslims, the Salafis. The violence of Muslims depends on individuals, not the religion itself. In addition, worth mentioning is that neither Sunni Muslims nor Shia Muslims are a cohesive entity. However, what is known with certainty is that there is a high degree of anti-US resentment among the Sunni and Shia Muslim population, and a common belief that the West is opposed to Islam. Allegedly an audiotape from the leader of al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, was given to the press in March 2003. Bin Laden encouraged Arab and Muslim citizens to rise up against their governments in the opposition for the US invasions in the Middle East. What is clear is that the conflict created an important opportunity for al-Qaeda and its ideological allies to gain support in the Middle East.

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28 Attacks made usually via Internet, that threaten property, lives, or in any way cause physical harm or disruption of infrastructure.
29 The Telegraph 4.11.2014.
30 Al Qaeda members in Iraq, shaving their beards, wearing jeans and Pledging allegiance to their caliph by Mobile messaging 25.2.2011, The Global Intelligence Files. WikiLeaks.
31 Moore 2015, 227.
32 Hayes 2006, 184.
1.2 Al-Qaeda Ideology and Ways of Warfare

America’s new enemies seem to have no demands. They can’t be bought, bribed, or even blackmailed. They only want to strike a blow at any cost. And if a suicide hijacker or bomber really believes that by dying in his jihad (Muslim holy war) he’ll go straight to heaven and Allah’s loving embrace, what earthly reward could the US or anybody else possibly offer as a substitute?33

Haynes (2014) describes al-Qaeda terrorists as religious extremist killing-machines. What is alarming is that he chooses to ignore the factors that have led to the rise of terrorist groups. In addition, he fails to acknowledge that also all terrorists are human and many might have doubt about going through with the planned attacks or panic afterwards and flee. Thus not all terrorists can be thought of only as cold-hearted killers.

An example of panic after an attack is Salah Abdeslam, an ISIS34 fighter, who was identified as one of the main planners behind the Paris terrorist attacks in November 2015, which killed 130 people. Abdeslam’s brother, along with other attackers involved, blew himself up but Salah Abdeslam decided to flee rather than kill himself. Suicide is commonly seen as part of a successful terrorist attack and therefore fleeing the site suggests a failure in the attack. A friend of his tellingly said that Abdeslam regretted what he did. “He told me he had gone too far. It went beyond what it was meant to be. But he could not turn himself in. This could have consequences for his family,” stated his friend suggesting that Abdeslam feared other ISIS fighters would take revenge. Investigators of the attack believe that Salah Abdeslam either panicked or made a last minute decision not to kill himself. In addition, the possibility that his suicide belt may have malfunctioned cannot be ruled out.35 This example demonstrates that even though terrorists are usually thought of ruthless killing-machines, every human can make errors and sometimes one’s life is a priority, not the terrorist organization and its goals.

Al-Qaeda is not an ideology itself.36 It is a multinational extremist Islamist organization, a terror group that operates as a network of a stateless army. Al-Qaeda works on the

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33 Haynes 2006, 180.
34 ISIS, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, is a jihadist terrorist organization that has operated since 1999.
35 The Local 20.11.2015.
36 Cronin 2014, 192.
foundation of the Wahhabism\textsuperscript{37} and jihad ideologies.\textsuperscript{38} Al-Qaeda is in a belief that they are involved in a multilevel jihad against all “traitor” Muslims, non-Islamic rulers and most importantly, the West. The inspiration for the organization’s ideology springs from three main sources: from Wahhabism, as mentioned, and the ideas of Sayyid Qutb and bin Laden’s deputy, Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri.\textsuperscript{39}

The United States is militarily and politically the most powerful nation state in the world and therefore uses the most advanced technology in warfare. Al-Qaeda, as other terrorist organizations, is a decentralized and transnational organization. Al-Qaeda, as most terrorist organizations, relies on borrowed technology and on the assumption that its members are ready to die for them, and to kill others in the process. The differences between al-Qaeda and the United States go much deeper than the ways of warfare. Al-Qaeda differentiates from the United States by their fundamental ideologies that divide the very basis of what the two consider being the primary purpose of war. It is not just a difference in how the war is fought; it is a difference in what they consider as winning the war.\textsuperscript{40} This fundamental difference is central to understanding the conflict.

Al-Qaeda’s warfare is mainly existential in nature, as the jihad is an ideological fight for survival – a war with no truce. To put it more precisely, there can be no other outcome than death or victory. In this sense the war is purely existential, and the suicide bombers are the most apparent example of it.\textsuperscript{41} The whole phenomenon of lone-wolf terrorism is an emerging issue, posing more widespread threat.\textsuperscript{42} Terrorist groups are mainly motivated by an ideology, and therefore are not as concrete an opponent as a nation state is. To make matters worse, the terrorists of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century seem not to be motivated to spare innocents and do not avoid pain or allow tolerance in society in the same way that mainstream terrorists of earlier decades did.\textsuperscript{43} However, the aim of 9/11 for al-Qaeda was not solely to cause terrible destruction but also to generate a global

\textsuperscript{37} Wahhabism the ultra-conservative form of Sunni Islam and the official religion of Saudi Arabia.
\textsuperscript{38} Vinci 2008, 74
\textsuperscript{39} Haynes 2006, 182.
\textsuperscript{40} Vinci 2009, 69.
\textsuperscript{41} Vinci 2008, 74
\textsuperscript{42} Gordon et al. 2015, passim.
\textsuperscript{43} Davis & Jenkins 2001, 7.
media spectacle, a stellar advertisement for the organization and its extremist militant ideological values.\textsuperscript{44}

In the attempt of attracting new members, al-Qaeda has directed a cartoon movie called “Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula” in order to recruit children into their organization. The movie is tellingly an exciting story about the Islamic religion and the Prophet, and how the Arab rulers are puppets of the West. It includes real incidents and features heroic actions by Islamists in the Prophet's peninsula.\textsuperscript{45} A Stratfor email (2010) includes speculation by an employee, Mohammed al-Shafey, that the online cartoons might be potentially very dangerous as it is effective in getting complex messages to a wide variety of audiences, including individuals who do not read the newspaper or attend political events. An online cartoon as a recruiting measure can be seen as another example of how the 21\textsuperscript{st} century terrorists have learned to take advantage of the Internet and its fast reach.

Not much different from Western thought, some aspects of al-Qaeda’s ideology also include universal themes, such as the focus on injustice and inequality. The problem, however, is how to adapt Western concept of thinking when asking: what do al-Qaeda terrorists want? The whole way of thinking is based on the assumption that the terrorists are trying to achieve concrete goals. A more abstract way of thinking might lead us closer. It might be more fruitful to examine why do al-Qaeda terrorists believe that they have to act as they do. In this case, killing people randomly in bomb attacks. There might not be a rational explanation for defending their religion and culture against Western attack.\textsuperscript{46}

Funding a multinational terrorist organization is expensive. A Stratfor email (2007) by Reva Goujon, a leading global strategy analyst, reports that al-Qaeda was starting to run short of money. While individual attacks might be quite cheap, running an organization and supporting the family members of killed al-Qaeda fighters is highly expensive. The reports show that there seems to have also been quite a secular side to the ideology of al-Qaeda since, tellingly, bin Laden appealed for money in his last message, arguing

\textsuperscript{44} Haynes 2006, 181.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Al Qaeda to produce animated movie aimed at recruiting children} 21.7.2011, The Global Intelligence Files. WikiLeaks.
\textsuperscript{46} Haynes 2006, 187.
that all Muslims had a duty to fight a financial jihad.\textsuperscript{47} What this might mean is that al-Qaeda’s supposed commitment to Islam is only circumstantial. Begging for money is frowned upon in the religion of Islam, according to Hadith\textsuperscript{48} number 508. In addition, executing illegal activities such as stealing, robbing and deceiving, is directly forbidden in the Quran.\textsuperscript{49} Therefore, al-Qaeda attracting fighters under the false pretense of Islamic duty can be seen as a strategy and their jihad merely as a façade.

\textsuperscript{47} The growing, and mysterious, irrelevance of al-Qaeda 22.1.2009, The Global Intelligence Files. WikiLeaks.
\textsuperscript{48} Hadith is a collection of actions, sayings and habits of the Prophet Muhammad.
\textsuperscript{49} Verse 2:188, Quran.
2 THE CONFLICT

2.1 Counterterrorism as War

Counterterrorism, in the context of the United States’ measures towards Al-Qaeda, includes all the ways by which the state can address the threats it perceives from groups identified as terrorists. Such actions can include engagements in a variety of areas. The priority to the United States’ counterterrorism policy is the threat created by Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. The goal of their foreign policy is a complete elimination of Al-Qaeda through war. The two are not however dependent on each other. A distinguish between the two proves that there would have been, and still is, more options for the United States for combating the threat of terrorism than a central focus on military force by the current state of war.50

A clear majority of the Stratfor emails examining the conflict itself are dated in 2011. What this means is that the company, and therefore the United States, had more strategic information about al-Qaeda after the year 2010 than they had before. The high amount of intelligence information the United States received might have contributed to the decision to move the withdrawal phase in 2011.

The War on Terror is a primary example of asymmetric warfare.51 From the very beginning, Al-Qaeda proved and still proves to be a difficult entity to attack. When implementing the use of military force, the main targets to hit are the people who constitute the group itself. Al-Qaeda’s most valuable assets are the strategists who identify targets and have the knowledge to construct bombs that can avoid detection. Furthermore, even more valuable than the operational leaders might be the charismatic leaders who represent the public face of the organization. “Al-Qaeda is just as much an idea as it is the organization that carries out its operations, but those ideas are produced and supported by individuals who are part of the organization”, writes McIntosh (2014) describing the terrorist organization.52 In other words, al-Qaeda as a concrete group was not as big of a threat to the United States as the strategically important people of the group.

50 McIntosh 2014, 30.
52 McIntosh 2014, 29.
It is essential to recognize, that terrorists have plenty of strategic and tactical advantages over government officials. Policymakers have the responsibility of protecting their countries against attacks, while terrorists do not. In addition to this, terrorists have better possibilities of exploiting existing vulnerabilities since there are plenty of information about the strengths and weaknesses of a state's defensive measures. Terrorist cells are also less hierarchical and less rational than national governments, and thus harder to anticipate. Terrorist cells are operationally independent and hence, able to act faster and to use more innovative measures than a nation’s law enforcement and counterterrorism agencies.\footnote{Shugart 2005, 12.} It is important to note that terrorism differs from war in measures, but not in ends.\footnote{Shugart 2005, 13.}

Nevertheless, the governments are well aware of the sizes, locations and efficiency of terrorist cells, especially the United States that has gone to great lengths to ensure national security. However, more information does not necessarily mean better results. Usually decision makers do not have time to assess all the information given to them or sometimes even think – rational judgment is replaced by gut decisions. From the beginning of the War on Terror the United States has gone from having too little understanding and knowledge of al-Qaeda to overwhelming amounts of data.\footnote{Cronin 2014, 181-182.}

Freedom and democracy are often seen as the only methods to demolish terrorist-friendly environments, referring to the theocratic monarchies and dictatorships of the Middle East. However, the relationship between democracy and terrorism is a highly complex matter, as oriental studies specialized professor Bernard Lewis has started “the war on terror and the quest for freedom are inextricably linked, and neither can succeed without the other.”\footnote{Freeman, 2008, 40} At the end of the day, democracy might be a solution for tyranny, however not possibly for the type of terrorism groups like al-Qaeda conduct.

The CIA Killing Program, a name the media reportedly borrowed from agency insiders, was a program launched in 2001. The program was set up to arrest or kill targeted Al-Qaeda operators. The specific operations were semi-outsourced to non-state professionals that were referred to as intelligence community associates, hence the CIA
Killing Program can be seen as an example of the development towards apolitical military markets. What is noteworthy is the entanglement of public and private, as the accountability of the military market networks is blurred between private and public security professionals. Nevertheless, the CIA director Leon Panetta decided to discontinue the program in 2009, since the program had cost 20 million dollars within its eight years of existence. Nevertheless, the development direction of the military markets should be observed, especially the current trend of outsourcing and the global warfare legislation should be updated accordingly in order to prevent any loopholes in international laws.

Future orientation and risk thinking are the basis of counterterrorism; action is taken to prevent future incidents. Nevertheless, future cannot be known and if a risk would be identified, it would be irresponsible not to take precautionary measures to protect the possible targets. However, actions justified by risk scenarios are extremely hard to question and disapprove. It is not possible to distinguish whether or not the measures taken were necessary and justified. The only sign of a successful counterterrorism is that nothing happens: the non-event.

2.2 Ending the Conflict

The best way to examine the war in Afghanistan is to think of the events in phases, not lump the whole war together as one event. A Stratford email (2011) by a company employee Frank Boudra describes that the war had four different phases. The first period was from 2002 to 2004, when the Taliban seemed to be beaten and there were high expectations for the future of Afghanistan. The first period can be understood as a time of illusion. The second period was between 2006 and 2009, when the Taliban were able to reform the insurgency from their safe place in Pakistan's tribal areas. The email describes that the third period, the time of the surge, started in 2009 when president Obama declared that the United States would be sending 30,000 additional soldiers to Afghanistan. The fourth and last phase, at the time when the email was written, is the

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57 Apoliticism is apathy towards politics and all political affiliations. An apolitical person is politically neutral and without any political attitude.
58 Leander 2011, 2261.
59 Leander 2011, 2254-2255.
60 Leander 2011, 2256.
61 Leander 2001, 2256.
drawdown and transition phase that started in 2011. As can be seen from tables 1 and 2 (page 24), the number of casualties was the highest during phases 3 and 4.

The War on Terror, as the war on al-Qaeda, seems to be never-ending. The reality is, however, that every war must come to an end. The United States’ counterterrorism operations, or more precisely wars, in Afghanistan and Iraq have both had setbacks and difficulties. Nobody seems to be winning. One might ask: what does it mean to win a war against terrorism? A Stratfor email (2011) stated that the death of bin Laden had a major symbolic significance as his charisma could be seen as a key to al-Qaeda’s brand and franchise. The email was written by Clint Richards, an open-source intelligence analyst and an associate editor of The Diplomat. It is clear that the symbolic importance of al-Qaeda was recognized in 2011 and the death of Bin Laden was therefore seen as an important victory. However, even if al-Qaeda was losing, the United States did not seem to be winning. In this particular war, no one seems to even understand what winning actually means. Even though crime is never-ending, every war must end, and so will the War on Terror.

The real question in my opinion is: can this war end? Almost all the great strategists in history have agreed that war cannot be fought successfully without a clear idea of an end. Sun Zi wrote of the chaotic Warring States period in China, more than 2500 years ago, stating that no country can benefit from a prolonged war and what is essential in war is victory, not prolonged actions. What causes problems in any endless war is that tactics slowly take the place of strategy. In this case the United States administration asked the CIA to fight the war for them, with an emphasis on drone attacks and special operations. The government was pushing the CIA to be strategic in a way it is not designed to be, whilst forcing the military to become more like the CIA.

What is clear is that al-Qaeda is not the same organization it was in 2001. What also changed from the beginning of the War on Terror were the United States’ counterterrorism measures towards al-Qaeda through the post-9/11 years. What does it

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64 Cronin 2014, 174.
65 Cronin 2014, 176.
66 Cronin 2014, 177.
67 Cronin 2014, 183.
mean to win an enemy that is constantly changing? The tactic changed from major warfare operations to counterinsurgency and nation building in Afghanistan and Iraq. Subsequently, the focus shifted towards aggressive special operations and global paramilitary intelligence activities. With a lack of strategy for war and its conclusion, it can be said that the United States replaced the actual threat of al-Qaeda with the possibility of al-Qaeda and its affiliates, and changed the focus from Afghanistan to a widening range of places in the Middle East.68

However, there is evidence to why the United States’ troops did not exit Afghanistan after the overthrow of the Taliban and the assassination of bin Laden. "The goal of defeating the Taliban and stabilizing Afghanistan has come to be treated as a kind of end in itself. It is not", states a study that is mentioned in a Stratfor email (2010). Over 50 American scholars and policymakers participated in the study. The study included recommendation for the Unites States troops to stay in Afghanistan in order to be ready to destroy any al-Qaeda cell that may regroup. It also disputed that a withdrawal would hurt Afghan women, whose rights suffered heavily under the Taliban rule.69

The United States has made clear tactical errors in the Middle East in terms of warfare, as a Stratfor email chain (2011) from the firm’s analyst displays. The email chain shows comments about how the United States has admitted their mistake of abandoning Afghanistan in 1989, which led to the rise of terrorism in the country, as explained in the introduction. The emails discuss the possibility of the same pattern happening again. However, the emails were proposing the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan and held Pakistan responsible for failed progress in Afghanistan. “Pakistanis allowed Afghanistan to devolve into the same warlord-riddled country that existed before we went in - -Would you have preferred that we stay there forever? We had to invade in 2001, no one disputes that. We stayed for a decade! But in the end, Afghanistan is Afghanistan, Pakistan is Pakistan, and what we tried - using our supposed ally to broker a negotiated solution - was the best possible option.”70 The analysts’ comments on the email chain give the impression that in their opinion the United States did exactly the right thing by invading Afghanistan in 2001 and that the

68 Cronin 2014, 178.
strategic errors made in the war were first and foremost Pakistanis’ fault, not the United States’. By making these statements, it seems that the Stratfor’s analysts try to gather intel to support the strategic decisions made by the government of the United States.
3 A NEVER-ENDING CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

3.1 Same Conflict – Different Battlefield

The United States’ war in Afghanistan, which is currently known as America’s longest war, officially ended in December 2014. Nevertheless, a fraction of troops remained in Afghanistan to operate on counterterrorism missions, alongside with NATO troops.\textsuperscript{71} However, reports (2015) from Kabul, Afghanistan, state that even though the war had ended officially months ago, the United States’ military had frequently conducted drone strikes against low-level insurgent forces and sent Special Operations troops on operations under the facade of “training and advising.”\textsuperscript{72}

As the War on Terror continues, the United States in a deadlock position. Losing the conflict is somewhat unlikely, although achieving victory is equally so. While the battle against al-Qaeda never completely ceased, it has taken a dramatic turn as the main focus of the United States’ counterterrorism has shifted from al-Qaeda to Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (also known as ISIL and Daesh) since 2013. While ending the state of war is politically highly problematic, functionally it could be possible.\textsuperscript{73} It cannot be known whether finishing the War on Terror would automatically mean a decrease in terrorism, however, it can be unquestionably said that the number of extremist attacks and terrorist groups are not going down in the current situation.

The United States overthrew the Taliban in 2001. A study that was mentioned in a Stratfor email (2010) claimed that the United States had only two main interests in the Middle East after the overthrow of the Taliban: preventing Al-Qaeda extremists and other terrorists to operate in Afghanistan and to ensure the safety of Pakistan's nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{74} If this was in fact the main goal for the United States in the Middle East, one might ask why does the War on Terror seems to have gotten more objectives as the United States decided to invade Iraq in 2003. Another Stratfor email (2011) might give some insight to the inner thinking of the United States’ war strategy. The email stated that the United States has a reason to fight terrorism in the Middle East for as long as the ideology of jihad against the West exists. This was not mentioned when starting the

\textsuperscript{71} The New York Times 27.5.2014.  
\textsuperscript{72} The New York Times 29.4.2015.  
\textsuperscript{73} McIntosh 2014, 35.  
\textsuperscript{74} Study urges US to scale back Afghan troops 8.9.2010, Wikileaks.
War on Terror in 2001. The statement reflects the military situation of 2011: the war had lasted for decade but victory was not near. By coming up with new rationale for the invasion, the United States had more reason to continue the War on Terror. For as long as the jihad ideology continues to influence people, extremist Islam will pose a threat on the United States’ soil, states the email send by a lead strategist Basima Sadeq. What makes the situation a vicious cycle is the fact that the other side, fundamental Muslims, feel the same way about Western countries invading their soil. From my point of view, jihad against the United States and its allies will continue at least until the Middle East is left alone.

The war in Afghanistan has brought many overwhelming changes into the lives of Afghans, however not all of them bad. A Stratfor email (2011) demonstrates how the rights of the Afghanis, especially women and children, have improved from the times of the Taliban rule. The email includes a statement from an anonymous Afghan woman that describes the feelings of the Afghanis women towards the Taliban: “When the Taliban first took power, people didn't really know what they were like. They do now and the women of Afghanistan will never forgive them.” Before the invasion, there were 1,2 million children in education and in 2011 there were 8,2 million. What is worth noticing is that 40% of them were girls. Only 8% of the population had access to basic health care under the Taliban rule. The same percentage in 2011 was 80%. In addition, the role of women also changed profoundly as they held 27% of the seats in the lower house of Parliament in 2011.

It is naive to think that the world consists of a strictly limited number of cultures, and that each of them have their own unique customs and beliefs. Globalization cannot be ignored in this respect as traditions blur into each other through interaction and influence. A Stratfor email (2011) sent by a company employee Frank Boudra includes a statement made by an anonymous United States’ official: "we can even see the end of al-Qaeda as the global, borderless, united jihad - - What that doesn't mean is an end to terrorists and people targeting the United States." In other words, the War on Terror was bound to shift to another area after the elimination of the immediate threat of

75 *Al Qaeda to produce animated movie aimed at recruiting children* 21.7.2011, WikiLeaks.
77 Haynes 2006, 186.
78 *U.S. officials believe al-Qaeda on brink of collapse* 27.7.2011, WikiLeaks.
al-Qaeda, and we can assume from the email that the United States knew that at the time. As we now know, the United States’ counterterrorism focus has shifted from al-Qaeda to ISIS and end of the War on Terror seems further away than ever in 2016.

An anonymous writer of a Stratford email (2011) accuses the United States’ government of false pretenses behind the War on Terror: “Disturbingly, this war is only about the extension of the power of a small section of elites in the US, having nothing to do with bringing the terrorists to justice.”79 It is unavoidable to see that the longer the conflict in Afghanistan goes on, the more disaster it brings to the citizens of Afghanistan. All in all, the War on Terror is not bringing an end to terrorism, but in my opinion, might even have the exact opposite effect. The United States’ counterterrorism operations around the globe could be increasing the likelihood of terrorist attacks on Western countries, not decreasing them. One might say that the battlefield has indeed changed – from war against terrorism to a war of power.

3.2 Critique and Opposition

The number of Americans who support the Afghanistan war increased in 2014 for the first time since President Obama declared that he would send in more troops in 2009.80 The demand for perfect security against al-Qaeda and other extremist Islamist terrorist attacks is increasing year by year. The United States’ military actions abroad are empowering the current technology-driven, tactical approach that their counterterrorism strategy seems to be building on.81

A Stratfor email (2011) contained information of a report, conducted by dozens of scholars, that revealed the conflict cost the Americans taxpayers 100 billion dollars a year in 2011 – seven times the amount of Afghanistan's gross domestic product at that time. Paul Pillar, a professor at Georgetown University and former CIA analyst who contributed to the report describes the United States’ counterterrorism policy the following way: "it certainly has lost sight of any careful comparison between the cost and benefit of waging the continued counter-insurgency there," he said.82 The

80 Support for Afghan war rises, poll shows 7.6.11, WikiLeaks.
81 Cronin 2014, 193.
82 Study urges US to scale back Afghan troops 8.9.2010, Wikileaks.
speculation reflects the common attitude towards the War on Terror in 2011: even though almost a majority of Americans saw the war in Afghanistan important, (Post-ABC News Poll) it is clear that the public doubted the real rationale behind the invasion. The poll conducted by Post-ABC News (2011), showed that 43% of Americans said the war in Afghanistan was worth fighting. What is interesting is that just a few months before the same percentage was just 31%. A Stratfor email analyses that the significant change in the support rates may have appeared from the voters Obama was wooing as he was campaigning for his re-election for 2012. However, a majority of Americans said that the war, which had lasted for more than a decade, was not worth fighting, despite the assassination of Osama bin Laden in 2011.83

When a democratic country enters a war, it is extremely challenging to fight with an objective balance of means and ends. “After blood has been spilled – especially that of innocent noncombatants, broadcast to the horrified stares of millions throughout the world – it is difficult to take the kind of antiseptic approach to ends, ways, and means that is at the core of strategic thinking,” describes Cronin in his article The ‘War on Terrorism’: What Does it Mean to Win? It is important to note that all wars spark emotions such as anger, revenge, and fury.84 Once certain lines have been crossed, retaliation and bitterness are inevitable in the minds of the opponents. Examples of this are the United States’ airstrikes in Afghanistan. A high number of civilian casualties of those strikes have created tensions with the Afghan citizens and officials. Even though American officials claim that their drone strikes are controlled and precise, the evidence show otherwise as American drone strike accidentally killed American and Italian hostages held by al-Qaeda in Pakistan.85

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83 Support for Afghan war rises, poll shows 7.6.11, The Global Intelligence Files. WikiLeaks.
84 Cronin 2014, 180.
A grim milestone was reached as the number of dead American soldiers in the Afghanistan war rose above 1,000, according to a Stratfor email (2010). The controversy over the United States’ invasion of Iraq has been consistently contrasted with the war in Afghanistan as the numbers of fallen troops have risen. However, many of those who have been against the Iraq invasion have supported the war in Afghanistan. The most common rationale for this is that the Iraq invasion deprived resources from Afghanistan, from the main counterterrorism operation against terrorism. As can be seen from table 1 and table 2, the Iraq invasion has claimed a higher number of casualties. What this might mean that the main emphasis of the United States military force was and still is, actually directed primary to Iraq instead of Afghanistan. The examined statistics have been created to inform the exact numbers of foreign troops casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan and therefore can be, in my opinion, seen as a reasonably reliable source. However, it should be kept in mind that the real number of the casualties have might not been announced in the first place by the countries involved. The United States may have hid the real casualty numbers of the wars in order to reduce the opposition of the War on Terror.

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The war in Afghanistan has often been seen as having a more direct effect on al-Qaeda and on the threat of radical Islamists towards the United States. The Iraq invasion has been seen as an independent operation that is unrelated to the main war, the War on Terror. Supporters of the Iraq invasion support the war in Afghanistan, and opponents of the Iraq invasion also support the war in Afghanistan, a Stratfor email (2008) by the company’s wordpress team reveals. In other words, all critique and opposition aside, if there has been a popular war in the eyes of Americans in the 21st century it has been the war in Afghanistan.

3.3 The Future of Afghanistan

What holds for the future of Afghanistan? The country will need multilevel support, analyses a Stratfor email in 2011. The support system is necessary for many reasons, and many of them still apply in 2016. Firstly, it is crucial to prevent violence from reaching unbearable levels as they once did. Secondly, the Afghan government needs support in developing its capacity to provide the needed services to the citizens; in particular a less corrupt and more efficient justice system needs to be developed. Thirdly, it is important to create possibilities for economic progress in Afghanistan, including the usage of the country's rich mineral and energy resources. And last but not least, to send a message to Afghanistan's neighbouring countries that it is not going to be abandoned as it once was.

Many challenges lay ahead of the country. A Stratfor email (2011) by a company strategist Frank Boudra contains information about speculation that Afghanistan would need commitment from foreign contributors of at least $7 billion a year, as a lot of money will be needed on security measures unless the insurgency weakens. It is clear that the United States did not want the numbers in the public in 2011 as it might had increased the opposition of the War on Terror.

The United States has shown dedication to avoid a collapse of power structures in the

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89 Ibidem.
country, in order to avoid the events that occurred in the years after the Russians left the country in 1989. Tellingly, things have started to take a turn for the better since the Taliban rule. For example Afghan journalists were still learning how to practice their trade, but they claim they have the freedom to inspect corruption among other things, according to a Stratfor email (2011). Quoting an anonymous American diplomat: “although it may take 30 years to develop the other institutions that civil society depends upon, there has nonetheless been an unremarked revolution”. 90

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CONCLUSION

It is clear that the intel gathered by Stratfor’s analysts are in support of the strategic decisions made by the government of the United States. The tone of the reports and comments in the emails is overall approving and supporting, apart from a few exceptions. Even though Stratfor is a private company and politically and ideologically uncommitted, an attitude pattern could be noticed from the analysts. If anything, Stratfor held other countries, such as Pakistan, accountable for the United States’ mistakes and the inability succeed in counterterrorism measures in Afghanistan.

The main focus of the United States’ counterterrorism measures towards al-Qaeda shifted from strategy to tactics during the examined time period 2004-2011. To put it more clearly, the United States’ administration asked the CIA to fight the war for them, by putting an emphasis on drone attacks and special operations. The government was pushing the CIA to be strategic in a way it is not designed to be, whilst forcing the military to become more like the CIA. As we now know, this was not a productive counterterrorism strategy as the United States failed to achieve significant military goals in Afghanistan, apart from the overthrow of the Taliban and the assassination of Osama bin Laden. Worth noticing is that the purpose of fighting often changes over the course of a prolonged war, and this might have added to the United States’ inability to end the conflict in time.

The decision to continue the War on Terror outside Afghanistan by invading Iraq in 2003 can be also seen as tactical move. The rationale for the invasion was the authoritarian rule of Saddam Hussein and possible nuclear weapons of Iraq. However, no proof of nuclear weapons was found in Iraq after the invasion in 2003 and the American troops still have not left the country in 2016. According to the same logic, one might ask why the United States chooses not to invade for example North Korea in the name of counterterrorism. It seems that as al-Qaeda is rationalizing their actions by Islam when it suits them the best, the United States is using their counterterrorism policy as a rationale to invade countries as they please. Neither can be seen as consistent.

It is ironic that the War on Terror presented an opportunity for the United States to disperse authoritarian regimes in the Middle East in the attempt to further democracy,
however by doing that, actually provided terrorist organizations an excellent chance to exploit the circumstances and gain material and ideological influence. As history has proven again and again, a common enemy is a strong power to unite divided forces. What this means is that the US-led invasion to Afghanistan increased the thought of radical Islam and jihad amongst Sunni Muslims as a consequence of Afghan civil casualties.

The future of Afghanistan is without a doubt fillet with violence and insurgency, as it is highly unlikely that it could disappear after decades of occurrence. One of the outcomes of the War on Terror was that al-Qaeda, “the base”, no longer has a physical base after its expulsion from Afghanistan. However, as al-Qaeda’s main goal for the 9/11 attacks was not to weaken the United States militarily but to spark fear and gain new recruits through publicity, their goals are in a way still being fulfilled. In this respect, the United States’ counterterrorism goal, a complete elimination of terrorist threat, is completely a fantasy. Like the United States learned in the Afghanistan war, the War on terror cannot end in total victory. As religious, political nor ideological unification is nowhere to be seen in the short-term future of the Middle East, backing out might be the only possible strategic move for the United States.

One might say that a war, in this specific case or in general, does not prevent terrorism, as it might even increase its probability. However, it is much easier to come to this conclusion now that the world has witnessed the gruesome outcome of the War on Terror. It might seem childish to state that violence does not solve anything, but in the event of a foreign invasion, this just might be the case. Democracy must come from the bottom to the top of the government. A stable nation cannot be created through violence, as it can only shatter a society even further. As an ancient Greek storyteller Aesop said: "united we stand, divided we fall".
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