

Effects-Based Operations and Counterterrorism¹

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Developments and crises across the globe over the last decade have demonstrated the significant security challenges that many nations have been experiencing during a transition from Cold War to post-Cold War security structures and approaches. Arguably the single greatest challenge posed within this new international system is the threat of modern terrorism. The danger of this threat was demonstrated most clearly by the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 (9/11) in New York and Washington. The United States and its coalition partners are currently experiencing the magnitude of this challenge in their global campaign against international terrorism.

This article will attempt to examine the relevance of the new concepts and capabilities of effects-based operations (EBO) in the fight against international terrorism. To do so, one must explore the philosophy of the effects-based approach with specific reference to the current phenomenon of radical Islamic terrorism and its leadership network, al-Qaeda. Furthermore, the article asserts that al-Qaeda itself is employing EBO in its terror campaign and that the only effective response must inherently involve a larger and higher-level effects-based strategy (EBS) by the United States and its allies.

The degree to which air and space power capabilities are relevant to the concepts of EBO and EBS will not be examined to any great degree. This does not reflect any judgement as to their actual, undeniable centrality to the concepts, but rather the fact that any such examination may be counterproductive to reaching a clear understanding of the more fundamental principle of the effects-based philosophy—all that matters is what is achieved, not how it is achieved.

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Effects-Based Operations and Strategy

EBO is defined as a conceptual process ‘for obtaining a desired strategic outcome or “effect” on the enemy, through the synergistic, multiplicative, and cumulative application of the full range of military and non-military capabilities’.² This is an adaptive process that takes the shape of a complex, interwoven pattern that spans the tactical, operational, and strategic dimensions of engagement.³ The enabling foundation of EBO is effects-based targeting, which involves creating and manipulating events using precision lethal and non-lethal capabilities that change an adversary’s behaviour and mind-set in a manner close to that which was originally intended.⁴

The planning process undertaken occurs predominantly at an operational level.⁵ It consists of an initial attempt to map forward in time the linkages of controllable actions and the relationship between their likely effects and the predefined objectives that drive the process. While this process preferably begins long before any EBO is launched, it is organic, evolutionary, and continuous, employing near-simultaneous planning that is coordinated across all echelons of command.⁶ This is a result of the necessity to account for secondary-, tertiary-, and greater-order effects that flow on from the original event like ripples across a pond, hopefully achieving the ultimately desired effect.⁷ While this is generally true of all combat, the exceptional sensitivity of EBO to this dynamic is of a far greater order and magnitude.

Whether this final effect in the end is really what was wanted and satisfies the predefined objective can only be judged at a later point in time, and from a strategic rather than a tactical or an operational perspective. Hence, the essence of EBO is its focus upon the outcome of any operation rather than how the operation is conducted. Furthermore, since the ultimate sourcing of EBO objectives is from the strategic or political level, this leads directly to the

² US Joint Forces Command, *Joint Forces Command Glossary*, <<http://www.jfcom.mil/about/glossary.htm>>.

³ T R Franks, USCENTCOM, ‘Briefing on Military Operations in Iraq’, release no. 03-03-44, 22 March 2003, <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iraq/2003/iraq-030322-centcom03.htm>>.

⁴ D A Deptula, ‘Firing for Effects’, *Air Force Magazine*, vol. 84, no. 4, April 2001, pp. 46–53.

⁵ Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Vision 2020*, GPO, Washington, DC, June 2000.

⁶ P Turner, M Round and A Preece, ‘Effects-Based Planning—A UK Research Perspective’ (paper presented at 2004 Command and Control Research and Technology Symposium, San Diego, CA, 15–17 June 2004).

⁷ N Cook, ‘Effects-Based Air Operations: Cause and Effect’, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, vol. 39, no. 24, 18 June 2003, p. 59.

conceptual heart of strategy—that war itself is simply an extension of politics by other means.⁸

This implies the necessity for political guidance toward some sort of strategic framework within which effects-based planning must be undertaken. This inference leads to the concept of EBO, which can be defined as the coherent application of all national resources on all national levels, guided by ends rather than by means or ways, in order to achieve grand strategic objectives.⁹ The significance of EBO in this strategic context is that it provides the imaginative leaders of advanced nations the capacity to truly target an adversary in a manner that can enable the achievement of the ultimate goal of skilful strategy - to subdue the enemy without fighting.

The Nature and Strategy of International Terrorism

The profound implications of the effectiveness of EBO and EBS with respect to modern conventional warfare have been demonstrated through the astounding conventional coalition victory during the initial occupation stage of the recent Iraq War in 2003.¹⁰ The war itself was described as an effects-based campaign by the US military, termed *shock and awe*, and embodied the most meaningful attempt in recent times at employing armed conflict in order to achieve a strategic outcome through the effects produced by military force.¹¹

Only time will ultimately tell whether this was in fact a successful attempt. While military victory was arguably inevitable, far less predictable is the actual desired strategic outcome of a safe and stable self-determined Iraqi government—one that honours human dignity and serves as a beacon for democracy in the Middle East. Yet the global debate that raged in the lead-up to that war, which has continued even more so since its seemingly incorrectly touted conclusion, concerns the relevance not only of the war in Iraq to the current global war against terrorism, but of war itself and any military response to the threat of international terrorism.¹²

⁸ C von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. M Howard and P Paret, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1976, p. 87.

⁹ A Stephens (lecture, Graduate Studies in Strategy and Defence, Australian National University, Canberra, 4 May 2004).

¹⁰ A H Cordesman, *The Iraq War: Strategy, Tactics, and Military Lessons*, Significant Issues Series 25, no. 5, CSIS Press CSIS Press, Washington, DC, September 2003, pp. 149–65.

¹¹ Paul Adams, ‘“Shock and Awe”—An Inevitable Victory’, in *The Battle for Iraq, BBC News Correspondents on the War against Saddam and a New World Agenda*, eds. Sara Beck and Malcolm Downing, BBC Worldwide Limited, London, 2003, pp. 105–6.

¹² S M Rahman, ‘Iraq War: Triumph or Tragedy?’ *Defence Journal*, vol. 7, no. 1, August 2003, <<http://www.defencejournal.com/2003-08/opi-c.htm>>.

At issue seems to be the unwillingness or inability of many to conceive of warfare as something beyond the purely physical, destructive, force-on-force exercise that has until now been the nature of warfare. The ability to out-maneuvre an adversary and apply an exceptional rate of battlefield attrition is indeed almost entirely useless and irrelevant when it comes to an ideologically driven global terror network such as al-Qaeda. However, the effects-based concept is not reliant on such physically limited means.¹³ At its fundamental core, EBO is about the mind perceptions and the cognitive dimensions of an adversary's reality, regardless of any physical or military inferiority or superiority.¹⁴ Al-Qaeda is employing EBO in its campaign of terror and has in fact arguably undertaken one of the most visible, high-profile EBOs in history - 9/11. Axiomatically, the degree to which 9/11 can be judged a success or failure from al-Qaeda's point of view can only be determined with the passing of time.

Shock and Awe

In terms of shock and awe, no aspect of the recent coalition campaign in Iraq can even begin to compare to the psychologically and cognitively devastating effects of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington in 2001, particularly of course for Americans.¹⁵ These attacks unquestionably set apart al-Qaeda from all other terrorist groups through its demonstrated ability to comprehend and plan for the dynamics of temporally grouped crisis events whose constructed linkages produced an emotional terror which far exceeded the sum of the individual acts themselves.¹⁶ The timing of the attacks to coincide with a peak window of the global media cycle is further evidence of the attention paid to the wider cognitive and informational effects intended to result from the attacks, rather than any simple physical destruction.¹⁷

Without further dissecting the attacks of 9/11, it should be sufficient to assert that al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and his terrorist planners are not simply madmen but are highly intelligent, imaginative, resourceful, and insightful individuals who clearly understand the fundamentally psychological and emotional nature of their own battle space.¹⁸ The events of 9/11 also

¹³ P T Bingham, 'Transforming Warfare with -Effects-Based Joint Operations', *Aerospace Power Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1, Spring 2001, pp. 58-66.

¹⁴ A Levine, 'Knowing Your Enemy', *The World and I*, vol. 19, no. 4, April 2004, p. 214.

¹⁵ W H Burkett, *Assessing the Results of EBO: The Relationship between Effects-Based Operations and the Psychological Dimension of Warfare*, Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 7 April 2003, p. 17.

¹⁶ C H Ren, 'Understanding and Managing the Dynamics of Linked Crisis Events', *Disaster Prevention and Management: An International Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, February 2000, p. 12.

¹⁷ B Ganor, 'Terror as a Strategy of Psychological Warfare', *International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, 15 July 2002, <<http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articleDet.cfm?articleid=443>>.

¹⁸ C Gray, 'Thinking Asymmetrically in Times of Terror', *Parameters*, Spring 2002, pp. 5-14.

clearly demonstrated their ability to conceptualise the second- and third-order capacity of effects that could result from their attacks.¹⁹ While the exact goals and specific motivations of bin Laden are now the intense focus of a great many analysts and commentators, a clearly enunciated aim has long been the elimination of Westerners and the US military presence in Saudi Arabia. Worth noting is the fact that the US response to the terror attacks has indeed been to withdraw its military presence.

The Global War on Terror

As mentioned previously, the mere assertion that any effective response to the threat of international terrorism can take the form of something akin to a war employing military means sparks intense debate.²⁰ This article does not intend to examine in any great depth the conduct of the war against terrorism up to this point, but some comment is perhaps necessary and relevant to set the tone for the discussion that will follow. It must be noted that—immediately following 9/11—the United States clearly and correctly acknowledged that the nature of the war to be undertaken would be unlike anything previously seen or conceived and that beyond its physical effects, much would be unseen and unknown.²¹ This hinted perhaps at recognition of the need for a focus on the cognitive and informational dimension of their enemy.

Furthermore, in response to the need for immediate mobilisation, the US campaigns first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq had to make do with then-current capabilities that had previously been designed for and suited to traditional, conventional military adversaries.²² New and rapidly evolving capabilities were indeed employed and guided by effects-based concepts, but these too were based on mostly traditional military platforms, such as the B-52 bomber.

The point to be made is that the campaigns were always going to look very traditional in much of their physical conduct. However, there was a significant application and evolution of effects-based thinking even between

¹⁹ Y Deva, 'Psychological Aspects of Combating Terrorism', *Asian Journal on International Terrorism and Conflicts*, vol. 7, no. 22, January 2004, <<http://www.stratmag.com/Aakrosh/ac72205.htm>>.

²⁰ I Eland, 'Are We Fighting a Real War on Terror at All?', *Independent Institute*, 4 February 2004, <<http://www.independent.org/newsroom/article.asp?id=1259>>.

²¹ G W Bush, Address to Joint Session of Congress, 20 September 2001, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>>.

²² D Rumsfeld, Address, House Armed Services Committee, Washington, DC, 5 February 2003, <<http://www.house.gov/hasc/openingstatementsandpressreleases/108thcongress/03-02-05rumsfeld.html>>.

the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.²³ This indicates that judging the US-led war on terrorism as fundamentally flawed by an emphasis on trying to defeat the enemy on a redundant battlefield perhaps overlooks the profound revolution in strategic military thought that is currently under way, based broadly around the effects-based philosophy.²⁴

The Threat of Rogue Nations

While the significance of the terrorist threat posed by a traditional nation-state such as Iraq is obviously a contentious issue, the threat does indeed exist in the form of two specific scenarios: (1) the provision of safe havens to terrorist networks and (2) their possible access to weapons of mass destruction (WMD).²⁵ The first such scenario does not require much elaboration since it was clearly and easily understood in the case of Afghanistan that denying al-Qaeda a territorial base of operations from which it can devise and launch operations is a fundamental prerequisite to undermining and eliminating the terrorist threat that it poses.

In relation to Iraq, however, the second scenario regarding possible terrorist access to WMD is now condemned as a fallacy that undermines any possible legitimacy for launching the war in the first place. But the significance of EBO in the war on Iraq that followed was profound, regardless of whether or not Iraq did in fact present a source of WMD capability to al-Qaeda.²⁶ The Iraq War clearly demonstrated the changed paradigm from old war to new—from former military objectives of exhaustion and attrition to the more direct achievement of regime change, network targeting, and territorial control utilising a far smaller scale of force and involving far less direct ground combat. EBO enabled the direct targeting of Iraq's centre of gravity—its leadership. US commanders also demonstrated the possibility of using their asymmetrically superior military capability in a measured, tailored manner in order to organise Iraqi options in such a way as to cognitively herd them toward the inevitable achievement of coalition objectives.²⁷

²³ L D Kozaryn, 'Myers Submits Annual Report to Congress', *American Forces Press Service*, 15 August 2002.

²⁴ I McNicoll, 'Effects-Based Operations: Air Command and Control and the Nature of the Emerging Battlespace', *RUSI Journal*, vol. 148, no. 3, June 2003, p. 38.

²⁵ 'Bush Declares Victory in Iraq', *BBC News*, 2 May 2003.

²⁶ D Jehl and J Miller, 'Draft Report Said to Cite No Success in Iraq Arms Hunt', *New York Times*, 25 September 2003, p. A1.

²⁷ M E Krause, 'Decision Dominance: Exploiting Transformational Asymmetries', *Defence Horizons*, no. 23, February 2003, pp. 1–8.

Targeting the International Terrorist Network

The series of terror attacks that have occurred in the aftermath of the Iraq War, however, have been a sobering reminder that the central focus of the current war against terrorism must remain on the al-Qaeda network. The most notable of these attacks included the bombings of the UN headquarters in Iraq in late 2003 and the Madrid train station in early 2004. From an EBO perspective, the challenges of targeting not a national leader but a globally dispersed network that is religiously and ideologically driven are profound.²⁸

Al-Qaeda truly represents the next generation of networkcentric adversaries, leveraging its own asymmetric advantage in employing its own objective-driven EBO.²⁹ Al-Qaeda is an enemy that hides in the cultural and political shadows of the world and strikes suddenly at the economic, political, and cultural centres of power of its enemy before fading back into the shadows and quietly assessing the results in terms of its overall strategy.³⁰ The difficulties in targeting such a foe are numerous.

From a defensive standpoint, the most powerful weapon available in the struggle to prevent terrorist attacks themselves and dismantle the networks behind them is intelligence.³¹ Collaboration between intelligence agencies, local police, and security services around the world is certainly the most effective approach to locating, monitoring, disrupting, and destroying localised al-Qaeda cells and radical Islamic groups.³² But the success of such an effort will always be limited to the tactical and operational levels. In order to effectively counter terrorism at the strategic level, it is necessary to target and disrupt the strategic guidance provided by the political leadership of al-Qaeda to its dispersed and otherwise independently operating cells.³³ The planning and conduct of an EBO such as the terrorist attack in Madrid, where the intended strategic effect certainly had nothing to do with Spain itself but with the attempt to undermine the coalition effort in Iraq, require planners to know the intentions of al-Qaeda leadership.³⁴

²⁸ W Arkin, 'A New Mindset for Warfare', *Washington Post*, 22 September 2001.

²⁹ D Hughes, 'Net-Centric War's Focus Should Be Counter-Terrorism', *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, vol. 157, no. 25, 16 December 2002, p. 55.

³⁰ C Spinney, 'Is America inside Its Own OODA Loop in Afghanistan and Iraq?', *Defense and the National Interest*, no. 499, 29 October 2003, <<http://d-n-i.net/fcs/comments/c499.htm>>.

³¹ S Dayl, 'Fight Terrorism with Intelligence, Not Might', *Christian Science Monitor*, 26 December 2003.

³² B Berkowitz, 'Intelligence for the Homeland', *SAIS Review*, vol. 24, no. 1, Winter 2004, pp. 1-6.

³³ For a more expansive exploration of this challenge, see W Murray, ed, *Transformation Concepts for National Security in the 21st Century*, Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 2002.

³⁴ N Friedman, 'Information Warfare Can Defeat Terrorists', *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, vol. 129, no. 4, April 2003, p. 4.

The ability of al-Qaeda to communicate its intent to operational-level leaders of the network must be the target of the intelligence-gathering effort, whether focusing on conventional communications, use of the Internet, audio- and videotapes released to the media by al-Qaeda leaders, or even through more creative means. However, as demonstrated by Israel's battle against Palestinian terrorists, no amount of intelligence gathering or security measures can totally protect against terrorist attack. What is critical to success in the war against terrorism is the capacity to minimise the strategic impact of any terrorist operation that might inevitably be successfully completed.³⁵

Dividing the Islamic Moderates and Extremists

The futility of trying to fight terrorism at the tactical and operational levels leads to the search for a solution at the strategic or political level. This is in fact implied by the effects-based concept itself. Furthermore, the necessity to target the collective minds of a broad society rather than just a limited network of minds or the single mind of a particular leader demands a wide-scale, long-term EBS campaign.³⁶ More so than in any other form of engagement with an adversary, the truism that prevails is that one must truly know himself and his adversary.³⁷ Unfortunately, much of what is said and written by leaders and commentators in the West seems to suggest that the motivations of al-Qaeda specifically and the root causes of radical Islamic terrorism in general are not properly understood at all. Simple explanations such as 'they are evil' or 'they hate us' indicate that the West does not understand its enemy.³⁸

The war against terrorism is in fact very much a battle against a specific breed of radical Islamic militancy that has adopted a grand strategy of seeking to spark a so-called clash of civilisations between the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds.³⁹ The desire for this civilisational clash seems to stem from the nexus between the fundamentalist beliefs of Wahhabi Islam and the religious Muslim ideology of Salafism, whose followers yearn for a return to the early medieval times during which Islam experienced its golden age.⁴⁰ Furthermore, and setting aside any tendency toward political correctness and religious sensitivity, the fact is that there is, to a degree, real

³⁵ A Barzilai, 'Getting the Aftermath Right', *Haaretz*, 23 April 2004, article no. 1088435.

³⁶ M Lynch, 'Taking Arabs Seriously', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 82, no. 5, September/October 2003, p. 81.

³⁷ See the seminal strategic-philosophical writings of Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. L Giles Dover Publications, New York, 2002.

³⁸ N Kristof, 'Why Do They Hate Us?', *New York Times*, 15 January 2002, p. A21.

³⁹ For a deeper analysis on the exact nature of such a clash, see S Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1996.

⁴⁰ J Hooper and B Whitaker, 'Salafi Views Unite Terror Suspects', *The Guardian*, 26 October 2001, p. 6.

identification by a majority of the Muslim world, including moderates, with the motivations and religious ideology of al-Qaeda.⁴¹ In fact, it is this identification that is the true source of strength and support for al-Qaeda and its associated terrorist networks. Therefore, this is perhaps the strategic centre of gravity of the current phenomenon of international terrorism, and it is here that any EBS campaign must focus.

This understanding lies at the heart of the references made by many to the need for a counterterrorism strategy that aims to 'drain the swamp' of the Islamic world or to 'win [the] hearts and minds' of secular and moderate Muslims.⁴² Any EBS campaign aiming to win Islamic hearts and minds would be profoundly complex and cannot possibly be suggested here in any great detail, though it might be helpful to broadly identify a possible target set.⁴³

The Islamic madrassa, or religious school, in which young Muslims are indoctrinated with fundamentalist and anti-Western beliefs and values, could be countered with alternative education aid programs. The Arab media, particularly the al-Jazeera television network, might be utilised as a communication medium with the Arab streets, in an attempt to balance or even counter the use of this platform by al-Qaeda itself.⁴⁴ An ongoing and widespread public relations campaign could be attempted to discredit terrorist actions and present counter-terrorism actions in the most favourable context possible.

The power of images such as that of the toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue in Iraq, which received insignificant coverage in the Arab world, might be leveraged.⁴⁵ Effective advertising campaigns might be devised and employed in an attempt to shape popular Islamic opinion. The Arab diaspora could be engaged within Western nations to form a cultural bridge between the West and the Islamic world. Overall though, what will be vital for success is for all these operations to be designed, launched, and managed as part of an overarching, coherent, and coordinated EBS campaign.

⁴¹ A Taheri, 'Al-Qaeda's Agenda for Iraq', *New York Post*, 4 September 2003.

⁴² M J Waller, 'Losing a Battle for Hearts and Minds', *Insight on the News*, vol. 18, no. 14, April 2002, p. 18, <<http://www.insightmag.com/news/225520.html>>.

⁴³ 'CIA Concerned US War on Terror Is Missing Root Causes', *Agence France-Presse*, 29 October 2002, <http://www.globalpolicy.org/wtc/terrorism/2002/1031_cia.htm>.

⁴⁴ M Green, 'Washington Focuses on Propaganda War: The White House Is Trying to Make Its PR as Slick as Its Military in the Battle to Win Hearts and Minds', *Financial Times*, 13 March 2002, p. 8.

⁴⁵ R Howard, 'The Dangers of Warfare in a -Media Age', *In the National Interest*, vol. 2, no. 16, 23 April 2003, <<http://www.inthenationalinterest.com/Articles/Vol2Issue16/vol2issue16howard.html>>.

Conclusion

The EBS required to combat international terrorism would echo the nature of the Cold War and the US strategy of containment against the Soviet Union, since the current war against terror can be won only by recognising that it is an ideological and geopolitical struggle.⁴⁶ This struggle must be fought with ideas and undertaken not just by the political leadership and the military but also by all levels of government, including diplomatic, informational, economic, social, and cultural means.⁴⁷ However, while the United States is perhaps the only nation with the capacity to assume a leadership role in this geopolitical battle against the radical Islamists, it cannot lead the ideological battle because it currently lacks legitimacy in the Muslim world. This is especially so because of US handling of the Palestinian issue and the close relationship between the United States and Israel. It is also true for other Western nations in general. Widespread Muslim distrust of America and the West will likely be a severely limiting factor of any EBS.

Another challenge to overcome in the employment of EBS is the political and administrative cycle of the leadership of Western and democratic nations. The relatively short time frames of these cycles may undermine the ability to properly plan and implement any EBS that will inherently need to be bipartisan and long-term in nature. A useful tool might be a national department or centre that can oversee the coordination of the multidisciplinary and cross-departmental efforts necessary at all levels of the state.

Exceptionally strong leadership and psychological resilience throughout society will certainly be required so that when inevitable terror attacks do occur, focus is maintained on long-term strategic goals rather than on any short-term reaction. The first response to any terrorist attack must be to ask what the intent of the attack is and what reaction the terrorist is trying to provoke. Any response that follows must then be undertaken as part of an effects-based campaign whose goal it should be not just to win the war against terror, but also to ultimately win the peace.

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⁴⁶ M Trevelyan, 'Rumsfeld Heralds Shift to War of Ideas on Terror', *Reuters*, 24 October 2003, <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2003/031024-terror-war.htm>>.

⁴⁷ Goh Chok Tong, Speech, Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 6 May 2004, <<http://app.sprinter.gov.sg/data/pr/2004050603.htm>>.