

STATEMENT BY

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THE UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY, WEST POINT, NEW YORK

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TO COMBATING TERRORISTS

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“INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO COMBATING TERRORISTS”

Chairman Tierney, Representative Shays, Distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor for me to provide testimony to you on the topic of “Innovative Approaches To Combating Terrorists.” Next week, in my Department—the Department of Social Sciences at the U.S. Military Academy, we will celebrate the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of **the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, which has a unique, critical, and innovative approach to understanding, teaching, and contributing to terrorism policy.** On behalf of our Distinguished Chair, General (retired) John Abizaid, and the many faculty members who work with us, I am happy to discuss this topic because we are passionate about it and appreciate your Committee’s interest in it. While I am proud to represent the Center, I should note that these remarks are my own and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Military Academy, the Army, or any other agency of government.

**Characteristics of this War**

We have studied war at West Point since our founding in 1802. While some have said the war against al-Qa’ida and other terrorists is new and old lessons don’t apply, in reality, I think that many aspects of this war are similar. For example, the President said: **“We face a hostile ideology-global in scope. . . ruthless in purpose and insidious in method. Unhappily the danger it poses promises to be of indefinite duration.”** While that could have been President Bush describing al-Qa’ida, it was actually President Eisenhower in his farewell address in 1961 describing the communist threat. As Eisenhower was president when that last long war started, it is important to recognize four key similarities with the current struggle against al-Qa’ida.

First, the war is not just a military war. Like the Cold War, it is also and perhaps more importantly, **intellectual and ideological**. It is not possible to capture, kill, or incarcerate ideas. We should not think of al-Qa`ida in terms of organizational charts and bureaucratic hierarchies that typify a conventional military enemy. Al-Qa`ida has become a brand name, a way of seeing the world, a vision for what they see as the future, which contrasts starkly from both what Americans believe and what “mainstream” Islamists believe.

Second, it is absolutely essential for the United States to **understand the enemy** in this war. At West Point, we are very familiar with Sun Tzu’s maxim stressing the critical importance of knowing your enemy. In this war, the enemy has often been characterized as the hostile ideology responsible for extremist Islamic radicalism. We must continue to develop a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of this ideology and what is driving it.

Third, as in the Cold War, it will take **all of the resources of this nation** to engage with the enemy—not just the resources of our Armed Forces. The U.S. comparative advantage is not just its great military, but **its great thinkers**—many of whom can be more productively engaged from civilian academe. When I was a cadet at West Point, I studied the Soviet Union and there were entire Departments of Sovietology spread throughout universities. Libraries were filled with the books on Soviet politics, military, and ideology and robust debates in and out of the government helped our understanding of the enemy. Many of these programs were supported by grants and funding by this Congress and it made a significant difference. We need a similarly sophisticated engagement with academia today so that all of the forces of the nation can be used in this war.

This is where the unique role of the Combating Terrorism Center comes in. As **both a military and academic institution**, all of our people have security clearances and are comfortable working with military and other government

agencies. At the same time all of our people are accomplished scholars who are equally comfortable at academic conferences engaging in the dynamic exchange of ideas. The Combating Terrorism Center plays a critical role bridging those with dot-mil (.mil) addresses with those with dot-edu (.edu) addresses.

Fourth, as we understand the enemy, it is important to **concentrate our efforts against the core** of that enemy. Just as all of the people under the control of the USSR were not our enemy, we have found that it is a relatively small and isolated group of extremists that are irreconcilable in this global insurgency. A small subset of radical extremists Jihadis are the enemy that we should focus on.

I spent the better part of 6 months last year in Iraq working for General Petraeus in Iraq. Part of the Multinational Force-Iraq strategy to identify and target irreconcilable elements while working assiduously to reconcile with those who can support the government. In a global counterinsurgency against al-Qa'ida, the real center of gravity is the ideas of radical Jihadist thought that enables the al-Qa'ida to spread even as its leaders are captured or killed. Reconcilable Islamists may not necessarily like the United States or everything that we stand for, but they are people who turn away from the vitriolic hatred of the extreme Jihadis and join "mainstream" Muslims to constructively engage in economic, political, and social relations.

To sum up, in his testimony in September, General Petraeus said we will not, "kill our way out of this war," but in fact we are working for a political and indeed ideological solution to the war in Iraq. Similarly, in the persistent conflict against terrorists, **we cannot kill our way out of it**. We need to recognize that it is an ideological struggle, we must work hard to understand the enemy, we must leverage all of the governmental and academic resources against it, and we must combine all of this knowledge to isolate and delegitimize the minority subset of irreconcilable extremist jihadis and their radical thinking.

## What We Have Done

Recognizing the importance of understanding the enemy and focusing on the thinking of the radical Jihadis, we focused the Combating Terrorism Center's research on the writing of the Jihadis themselves. This has come in two forms.

First, **we have concentrated on studying al-Qa'ida's own writings.** Because of our successful military operations in Afghanistan, al-Qa'ida no longer has a secure base to operate from—so they have turned to the virtual world of the internet to educate, unite, clarify, and discuss their policies. Many of the Jihadi Movement's most important books and papers are housed on a website that serves as al-Qa'ida's on-line library of over 3,000 books and articles.<sup>1</sup> These texts have been downloaded tens-of-thousands of times and have been found in the possession of both dead and aspiring terrorists. For example, the Madrid train bombers had more than 50 of electronic books we studied on their computers.

By reading these texts, we can gain great understanding about what al-Qa'ida thinks, who its leading thinkers are, and what they are saying to each other. The title of one of our first publications, by Jarret Brachman and Will McCants, is "**Stealing al-Qa'ida's playbook.**" That is exactly what we are doing by reading their ideology, understanding their strategy, and then proposing policies to counter it.

Second, **there is a great repository of information that has been captured** on the battlefield from al-Qa'ida and other terrorists. These are kept in a database, established by the Defense Intelligence Agency, called "Harmony." We have been given some of these documents after they were declassified and translated. By reading, understanding, and exploiting that information, we can link the intelligence finds of the war with the academic scholars who can help us understand the enemy, identify the weaknesses in its organization and ideology, and expose its hateful, extremist worldview that is antithetical to mainstream thought.

This process has led to what we call the **Harmony series of reports**. We study the documents we have been given and then publish Harmony report in two parts: First, Part 1 is a detailed academic report citing the documents and putting them in context. Second, Part 2, which is arguably more important, is that **we release all of the documents** in their complete English and Arabic versions so that other researchers can download the original documents and make their own conclusions. This is where our “academic” or .edu role comes in. We encourage peer review, disagreement, and argument over our conclusions. Our objective is not to necessarily have people agree with us, but to encourage others to study and understand the actual documents of the enemy so that they advance the knowledge of al-Qa’ida and devise creative ways to defeat them.

This only other organization that does this unclassified release of documents in a robust way is the **Open Source Center**, established by the DNI and CIA. Whatever you can do to support the translation and release enemy documents and other material, will provide great insights that can significantly help all of us understand who we are fighting and how to counter their ideological hatred.

I have references in the text to all of our reports and would encourage anyone who is interested in reading them to go to our website: <http://ctc.usma.edu/>. To briefly summarize, we have found from al-Qa’ida’s own documents that **they are extremely candid about their strengths and vulnerabilities**. They do after action reviews of their actions and identify their problems, fissures, internal divisions, and specific disputes. If we understand their writings we can better leverage all of the resources to exploit those vulnerabilities.

From the “**Harmony and Disharmony**” report,<sup>2</sup> LTC Joe Felter found that al-Qa’ida faces significant organizational problems, including pay, contract disputes, conflicts among workers and managers, and the difficulty of monitoring implementation of specific al-Qa’ida policies. From the “**MisAdventures in the Horn of Africa**” report,<sup>3</sup> we found that al-Qa’ida had particular challenges in

ungoverned spaces, such as Somalia, where local warlords were not likely to tolerate outsiders and there was no weak government for them to coerce or intimidate. In the “**Cracks in the Foundation**” report,<sup>4</sup> Vahid Brown found that al-Qa’ida leaders have generally emerged into two factions—one committed to building an effective, organized guerrilla fighting force and another focused on establishing al-Qa’ida as a global brand that focused on ideological appeal to all fighting in a violent resistance. Finally, in the “**Foreign Fighters in Iraq**” report,<sup>5</sup> Joe Felter and Brian Fishman analyzed nearly 700 captured individual foreign fighters records, complete with pictures, phone numbers, hometowns, and other data. By analyzing and publishing this information, we not only provided a contemporary, data-driven look at who comprises foreign fighters in Iraq, but dozens of academics and news organizations around the world have picked up the story and are continuing the research into those who would support extremist jihadi causes.

As an academic, although we have had thousands of downloads from all over the world, you sometimes never know if you are on the right track with your work and your reports. Last May, we had an unlikely confirmation that we were effective from Ayman al-Zawahiri, the number two leader in al-Qa’ida, in one of his video tapes. In one of our papers, we had discussed specific strategies that would support reconcilable, mainstream Salafi figures and Zawahiri actually read from the CTC’s own report in his video message, citing the CTC’s recommendations it as something that they must counter. (Show Zawahiri video).

What we have learned in the past five years is that we don’t have all of the answers, but that we can, through leveraging the resources of both the government, and, especially, scholars in the academic community, to **understand, analyze, and ultimately counter the ideology of al-Qa’ida**. Thanks to the far-sighted West Point graduates such as Vinnie Viola, George Gilmore, and others whose private funding established the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point and the efforts of individuals in Special Operations Command to support our

research into better understanding al-Qa'ida, we believe that we are making a difference.

Douglas MacArthur during his farewell address in 1962 told the Corps of Cadets “Through all this welter of change, your mission remains fixed, determined, inviolate—it is **to win our nation’s wars**.” This maxim is just as true today. At the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, we strive to link the scholars and the warriors—the intellectuals and the operators—to understand the enemy and exploit that knowledge to help defeat the enemy. The cadets that I teach will graduate in just over 100 days and soon be serving our nation at war. This gives us focus to our critically important mission of equipping West Point graduates with the best intellectual skills possible so that they are prepared to face this enemy, which they will confront throughout their careers.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee. I look forward to answering your questions.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2006, the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point used this library to map the Jihadi Movement’s most influential ideologues. The results are now available online: <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/atlas.asp>.

<sup>2</sup> See “Harmony and Disharmony: Exploiting Al-Qa'ida's Organizational Vulnerabilities,” available at: <http://ctc.usma.edu/aq/aq.asp>.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Qai'da's (mis)Adventures in the Horn of Africa,” available at: <http://ctc.usma.edu/aq/aqII.asp>.

<sup>4</sup> See “Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Schisms in al-Qa'ida from 1989-2006,” available at: <http://ctc.usma.edu/aq/aq3.asp>.

<sup>5</sup> See “Al-Qai'da's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records,” <http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/CTCForeignFighter.19.Dec07.pdf>.