

Strategy Research Project

New Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Applying Corbett's Theory Beyond the Sea

by

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Class of 2014

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved--OMB No. 0704-0188

The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 15-04-2014		2. REPORT TYPE STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE New Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Applying Corbett's Theory Beyond the Sea				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Lieutenant Colonel Aaron D. Altwies United States Air Force				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Professor Douglas E. Waters Department of Command, Leadership, and Management				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Avenue, Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Approved for Public Release. Distribution is Unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Word Count: 5,294					
14. ABSTRACT The National Security Strategy calls for the defeat, disruption, and dismantlement of al-Qa'ida and its affiliates. However, after 14 years, the goal to defeat al-Qa'ida seems unattainable. The goal should be changed from defeating al-Qa'ida to making them irrelevant. If the ends change, then the strategy must also change. Theorist Sir Julian Corbett's ideas of command of the sea, dispute, and limited war align well with the new endstate. Using analogs between the Corbett of 1906 and his ideas applied contemporaneously, a maritime strategy develops as an option to degrade al-Qa'ida. Further, when maritime strategy concepts are expanded beyond the sea and military, then a much greater opportunity arises for strategic leaders to think about how to disrupt, dismantle, and make al-Qa'ida and their affiliates irrelevant. The United States should apply maritime theory ideas to the whole of government using all of the instruments of national power, making the strategy even more powerful.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Maritime, al-Qa'ida, Command of the sea, Dispute of the Sea, Limited War					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 30	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UU	b. ABSTRACT UU	c. THIS PAGE UU			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (w/ area code)

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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Classification: Unclassified

The National Security Strategy calls for the defeat, disruption, and dismantlement of al-Qa'ida and its affiliates. However, after 14 years, the goal to defeat al-Qa'ida seems unattainable. The goal should be changed from defeating al-Qa'ida to making them irrelevant. If the ends change, then the strategy must also change. Theorist Sir Julian Corbett's ideas of command of the sea, dispute, and limited war align well with the new endstate. Using analogs between the Corbett of 1906 and his ideas applied contemporaneously, a maritime strategy develops as an option to degrade al-Qa'ida. Further, when maritime strategy concepts are expanded beyond the sea and military, then a much greater opportunity arises for strategic leaders to think about how to disrupt, dismantle, and make al-Qa'ida and their affiliates irrelevant. The United States should apply maritime theory ideas to the whole of government using all of the instruments of national power, making the strategy even more powerful.

New Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Applying Corbett's Theory Beyond the Sea

Beyond Afghanistan, we must define our effort not as a boundless "global war on terror," but rather as a series of persistent, targeted efforts to dismantle specific networks of violent extremists that threaten America.

—President Barack Obama¹

The National Security Strategy gives clear direction regarding terrorism, specifically calling for the defeat, disruption, and dismantlement of al-Qa'ida² and its affiliates.³ From here, the guidance flows through not only Department of Defense strategies and policies, but also the Department of Homeland Security.⁴ President Obama's statement above clearly touches on national interests and intent that should drive a national strategy. The United States uses its instruments of national power-- diplomacy, information, military, and economic--to influence both state and non-state actors. The ways, when combined with the means and clear ends, develop into a strategy. The strategy can falter and can even be misapplied when the ends, ways, and means are not balanced.

The United States has employed different strategies based on the political situation. It has practiced diplomatic strategies of isolation and coercion, military strategies based on land and sea power, and economic trade strategies just to name a few. As the United States moves forward in its war against terror, it must revise its strategy and better balance the ways to meet its goals. The continental strategy⁵ of force-on-force land power inside national boundaries is becoming archaic. The idea of fighting terrorists on a field of battle with overwhelming land power is incongruent with reality. Al-Qa'ida no longer masses in formations. As a way forward, the United States should adjust the maritime strategies of old to the current and future fight against al-Qa'ida and its affiliates in order to meet national objectives.

While there are many roads to travel in this discussion, this paper will demonstrate the strategic endstate of *defeating* al-Qa'ida should be replaced with making al-Qa'ida *irrelevant*. When leaders adjust the endstate, they must also adjust the ways. As previously discussed, the maritime strategy fits into the new way and leaves the continental strategy behind. The paper will explore the maritime theory of Sir Julian Corbett, providing analogs to compare traditional maritime strategy to modern application. In the end, the reader will be able to understand why the modern application of a maritime strategy, with aligned ends ways, and means, make it possible to more effectively prosecute the current fight against al-Qa'ida and its affiliates.

The Current Strategy

In the *2012 Defense Strategic Guidance*, President Obama wrote, "We have . . . put al-Qa'ida on the path to defeat."⁶ While it is true there have been zero major successful attacks on the homeland since 2001, the Nation has not met its objective to defeat al-Qa'ida. As the *2014 Quadrennial Defense Review* notes, "Although core al-Qa'ida has been severely degraded, instability in the Middle East and civil war in Syria have enabled al-Qa'ida to expand its global reach and operate in new areas."⁷ Al-Qa'ida has been organizationally dismantled, but has reemerged in other places like Yemen, Iraq, and northern Africa. In line with the National Security Strategy, the terrorist group has been disrupted, evidenced by its inability to conduct major attacks against the United States, but one cannot argue it has been defeated.

A major issue with the strategy employed since 2001 is tied up in the word "defeat." This word is an operational term with specific outcomes. Defeat comes when the enemy has lost the means or the will to fight.⁸ The term conjures the thought of combat, which continues with the use of a ground force. In strategic terms, this likely

suggests employment of land forces (army, special operations forces, or Marines, for example) as the means to achieve the objective. Strategic leaders had the choice of using land, air, or sea power as the military way to achieve the goal to defeat al-Qa'ida. Appropriately, all three ways were used. With the preponderance of effort under the land power umbrella, one can argue that a continental (land-based) strategy was used to fight al-Qa'ida in Afghanistan.

A continental strategy is useful when the belligerents agree to operate in the same battlespace and fight using conventional means. Armies applied this type of strategy in the World Wars as well as the continental wars in North America.⁹ In modern times, the continental strategy also applied to Operation DESERT STORM, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) in Afghanistan, and Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. In these cases, the object of the conflict was to control territory by expelling the enemy and to reestablish governance. Therefore, the United States and its allies and partners fought a land war with the end purpose of defining or reestablishing borders and enabling civil governments. However, for OEF, once territory was restored and government was in place, the campaign changed to focus on ideas. Al-Qa'ida was not defeated and their ideas remained in the same battlespace as coalition military and also began to spread to other geographic locations.

The history of how the war on terror began, the chosen strategy, and the long prosecution of conflict are important because it allows the reader to frame the past in order to look to the future. In 2001, the United States began its efforts to combat al-Qa'ida by exploiting communications and intelligence data. But most visible was the authorization for the President to:

Use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.¹⁰

From here came heavy use of the military instrument in a continental strategy with over 9,000 troops in Afghanistan in September 2002.¹¹ The continental strategy made sense because it was a focused, land-based effort using land forces to engage a massed enemy. It was focused on defeat. However, if defeat defines victory, then the United States still has some difficult work to do if it chooses to meet this strategic objective.

By redefining the objective, one can relook at the ways and means and attempt to rebalance the strategy. Changing the objective to making al-Qa'ida and its affiliates irrelevant is more attainable than defeat. While both may be on a scale of success,¹² al-Qa'ida's irrelevance is really what is driving action. Irrelevance does not mean al-Qa'ida ceases to exist or no longer wishes to inflict damage upon the United States or its interests. Irrelevance means not allowing al-Qa'ida access to finances and ideological hotspots, and isolating them from other communities of interest. Since 9/11, Al-Qa'ida has not demonstrated the ability to attack the United States or its interests with great effect.¹³ When this happens, they become irrelevant to other similar groups, their financiers, and those they seek to target. Irrelevance derails al-Qa'ida's attempts to meet its own internal goals. While this sounds like defeat, al-Qa'ida's will has not been broken, and they still desire to attack.

Even after billions of dollars and lives spent fighting al-Qa'ida, the only way to get "defeat" as a measure of victory is to spend much more. One then must ask how much is too much? In the current fiscal situation, this is an even more important question.

Limited means demands the strategy be looked at in parallel with risk. The next logical question regarding means is to ask what the risk is by applying fewer means.

Changing the national objective to “irrelevance” with regard to al-Qa’ida does bring risk. The current situation brings a return from Iraq and Afghanistan, non-commitment to known al-Qa’ida strongholds in the Maghreb or Yemen, and limited influence against al-Qa’ida hotspots in Iraq and Syria. The risk of moving from “defeat” to “irrelevance” may be an increase in attacks or rise of al-Qa’ida influence after a successful attack. Regardless, the reduction in means is a distinct factor in the change to the proposed national objective. To meet this new condition, strategic leaders should consider a move away from a continental strategy towards a maritime strategy.

Maritime Strategy

In 2014, the land-based strategy assumes certain conditions that must be reconsidered. It assumes borders are real, that there will continue to be force-on-force engagements in the land domain, and that the national goals are still achievable with regard to defeat. As the United States moves forward in its conflict with al-Qa’ida, it must reframe the environment in order to change to a strategy more in balance with ways and means. If one looks carefully, this change is happening.

The maritime strategy concept is not new. One can see the makings of strong maritime strategy in the way Athens went about its influence during the period of the Peloponnesian War. More modern incarnations of the strategy develop naturally from the maritime states. As examples, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Japan are all maritime nations. So, too, is the United States. Therefore, it makes sense for the United States to apply a maritime strategy as it strives to protect its national interests abroad.

The works of American Admirals Alfred T. Mahan and J.C. Wylie in conjunction with British theorists Dr. Geoffrey Till and Sir Julian Corbett contribute greatly to the thoughts regarding naval and sea power. One can easily take their works and apply them contemporaneously to national security issues. They would certainly argue that sea power is as important in the current time as it was 50 or 100 years ago. Mahan's six elements of maritime power and how they depend on geographical position, territory, population, and national character still hold merit.¹⁴ Wylie asserts a strong navy should conduct passive defense of its own and an active destruction of the opposing force.¹⁵ Till brings the ideas of globalization to the maritime theory, recognizing one of the developments to be a "borderless world."¹⁶ Finally, Corbett posits about command of the sea and the sea in dispute as his contributions to maritime theory. While these great thinkers all add to the picture, Corbett's concepts provide the greatest application to the fight against terror.

The time has come, however, to expand the thoughts of the original maritime theorists. When they wrote, they were focused on sea control. However, as air and space domains became more accessible and exploitable, others have begun to see the relevance of maritime theory to these other domains.¹⁷ Moreover, as understanding of the cyber domain increases, one could apply the principles of maritime strategy here as well. To take it a step further, because the domains are more connected than ever, one could apply Corbett's principles to all domains. It is not, however, a one-to-one comparison. Further, the use of a maritime strategy does not eliminate the need for a land force. Rather the use of a land force must be at the right time and place to fully enable the strategy.

As a student of Clausewitz,¹⁸ Corbett subscribed to the understanding that policy is always the object of war. War is only a way to get to the object and the means must always keep the ends in view.¹⁹ Moreover, he conceded that maritime strategy is concerned about the relations of both the army and navy in plans for war.²⁰ Using an analog, one can extend his ideas to embrace air, space, and even cyber in the calculation of means. Even in 1906, Corbett was visionary enough to recognize land and sea depended upon one another strategically. This vision allows the leap to contemporary issues and the application of Corbett's theory.

A key component of the use of a maritime strategy and its analogs is to understand the idea of the global commons, or those areas "traditionally defined as those parts of the planet that fall outside of national jurisdictions and to which all nations have access."²¹ While civilians define the global commons as the high seas, the atmosphere, Antarctica, and space,²² the Department of Defense has expanded the term to include "space, international waters and airspace, and cyberspace."²³ Recalling Till's idea of the "borderless world," the global commons describes the areas where al-Qa'ida operates. Thus, the United States must be able and willing to operate there as well.

The reality is, however, that sovereign borders exist, providing a constraint to be considered. The caution is that in the fight against al-Qa'ida, the United States cannot necessarily gain control of territory--an end result of Corbett's ideas--because state sovereignty is an issue. The White House acknowledged:

Whenever the United States uses force in foreign territories, international legal principles, including respect for sovereignty and the law of armed conflict, impose important constraints on the ability of the United States to

act unilaterally – and on the way in which the United States can use force. The United States respects national sovereignty and international law.²⁴

As a non-state actor, al-Qa'ida does not have to follow the constraints of territory, and they certainly do not follow the rule of law. Rather, al-Qa'ida takes advantages of both of these conditions. They move about when and where able and expose a point that emphasizes command of lines of communication is a difficult condition to acquire.

Corbett's Principles Applied to the Modern Situation

Corbett based his theory on command of the sea, pared down further to control of maritime communication. He envisioned sea lines differently from land communications because the sea encompasses more than just territory. To him, maritime communication was the linchpin of strategy. One could achieve command in one of two ways: either secure the lines or prevent the enemy from securing the lines of communication.²⁵ With command secured, Corbett's theory asserts the ability to apply direct military pressure ashore while maintaining defense against the enemy. To Corbett, protecting maritime communications was more of a way than an end. Controlling the communications meant a military, economic, and financial advantage. For the enemy, the lack of maritime control resulted in reduced means which, in turn, overthrows the "enemy's power of resistance."²⁶ As Corbett's basic premise, command of the sea brings with it the strategic weight to both press the protagonist's advantage and deny the enemy's leverage.

Command of the Sea

Command of the sea applies in the fight against terror if one thinks differently about how to apply the concept of maritime communications. In this case, maritime could refer to the global commons discussed above. One can draw a parallel, for

example, between commerce shipping and global banking or financial systems. In its efforts to disrupt al-Qa'ida, the United States continues to isolate the financial lines supporting the terrorist's objectives by exerting pressure on the systems that support al-Qa'ida. Similarly, by following the money trail, the United States is able to gain an advantage and is better able to seek out and dismantle the al-Qa'ida leadership by applying other ways (military, diplomatic, and information, as examples).

An important concept of command is that a state cannot control the whole of the sea (global commons), so it seeks to control the important communications. Since the character of war continues to change in the intensity and domains in which it is fought, then this definition should be applied to conditions where a state strives to gain or maintain an advantage. The United States seeks to gain control of those areas most beneficial to the strategy, including cyber, financial, and information to name a few.

The United States uses special operations forces and unmanned aerial systems to gain command by applying direct military pressure. Striking the enemy from a position of strength is an important part of having command. When terrorists appear, they are targeted in the same way an enemy ship would have been targeted by the stronger naval power in Corbett's time. As an example, four al-Qai'da leaders in Yemen were targeted and killed by an unmanned aerial system on March 3, 2014.²⁷ On October 5, 2013, special operations forces conducted raids in Libya and captured a senior al-Qa'ida leader, prompting Secretary of State Kerry to say terrorists "can run, but they can't hide."²⁸ These types of operations are perfect examples of a maritime strategy at work. Instead of using ships to exact damage and disruption, the United States uses its own version of "cruisers."

Corbett would look at the current situation and determine the United States has gained general command in its fight against al-Qa'ida. He explained that general command is established when the "enemy is no longer able to act dangerously against our line of passage and communication or to defend his own, or in other words he is no longer able to interfere seriously with our trade or our military or diplomatic operations."²⁹ The essential point is al-Qa'ida currently does not pose a serious threat and cannot impose serious interference on United States interests. This does not mean that al-Qa'ida does not continually attempt to wrest command away from the United States.

Dispute

When command is not achieved, there are two ways to conduct naval warfare: one could either "obtain or dispute the command of the sea," or exert control that one already has.³⁰ The second case forces the stronger and weaker powers to understand where they fit with regard to conducting offensive or defensive operations. The aim of defense is for a power to deny the enemy something or prevent the enemy from gaining something. Corbett argues for the offensive as the desired and more efficient approach for the stronger power, and leaves the defensive to the weaker power because it requires less force.³¹ In reality, a combination of both must be used depending on the domain or location. As the United States shifts to get off a war footing, the defensive must come into play, but is not a signal of a weaker power. Recognizing the options above leads to strategic decisions supported by a maritime strategy.

The first of these cases is interesting when one considers dispute of command. This case occurs when relative strength is not adequate to command the sea and is the norm until the powers reach a final decision.³² Corbett's two rules for dispute come from

the view point of the enemy: if dispute can force a power to concentrate, operating by evasion is an option for the weaker, and during dispute, if the weaker cannot obstruct passage, he may be able to defend his own passages (critical lines).³³ Al-Qa'ida forced the United States to concentrate its force in Afghanistan, rotating hundreds of thousands of military members into the fight. At the same time, al-Qa'ida used Pakistan as a safe haven to defend their critical lines. Naval analyst Norman Friedman wrote the maritime strategy could be a bait and trap strategy to pull forces out for battle during a dispute situation.³⁴ Perhaps this was al-Qa'ida's intent even back in 2001, when they demonstrated clear use of maritime strategy concepts. Regardless of the severe disruption imposed on al-Qa'ida, they slipped away to strengthen in other places like Yemen, Somalia, northern Africa, Syria, and the Middle East.

Dispute brings the concept of Corbett's possessing a "fleet in being" and conducting minor counter-attacks. Corbett maintained the fleet had to be in service for it to serve a purpose and should not necessarily seek battle lest it be lost. At the same time, cruisers would conduct minor counter-attacks against targets and at locations not well protected by the opposing force.³⁵ Dispute normally comes from the weaker side. Therefore the inferior force resorts to the "fleet in being" and counter-attack concepts.

One should resist applying Corbett's idea of dispute only to the United States, which is a major power. Instead, one can equally apply the concept to al-Qa'ida as they operate against the United States. Al-Qa'ida certainly does not match the military strength or the financial resources of the United States. They cannot pick a decisive point to bring their full force to bear, as they would be overmatched. Therefore, al-Qa'ida garrisons its forces out of sight and does not offer military battle. Instead, they

turn to the minor counter-attack in the form of improvised explosive devices, bombings in major cities like Madrid and London, and attacks against ships like the USS *Cole*. By disputing command, al-Qa'ida attempts to deny the United States the command it seeks to obtain and forces the United States to fight on different terms.

A dangerous situation lies in the deployment of weapons of mass destruction. Al-Qa'ida could deal a strong counterstroke with catastrophic consequences in the homeland. This scenario highlights a key aspect of the maritime strategy concept: the weaker seeks ways to dispute because they are limited in their means. A successful counterstroke can force the stronger to reallocate resources into defense and away from command of communications. If al-Qa'ida were to successfully deploy these weapons, it could force an inward look and retrenchment of military forces. In this case, the global commons becomes more open for the weaker to gain strength.

Consider the dispute concept and extend the analog to the cyber domain. Al-Qa'ida has used the internet to raise money, spread their message, recruit members, plan and control operations, select targets, and send cryptic messages.³⁶ One might characterize the United States as on the defensive in this situation, requiring it to dispute control of the cyber domain. Recalling that dispute does not equal control, the United States does not have to be everywhere in the cyber domain as it opposes al-Qa'ida. Rather, the United States must find the key nodes of weakness and dominate them at the time of its choosing. In the cyber realm, the United States continues to break cyphered messages, listen to communications, and discern what al-Qa'ida is going to do next. Dispute was quite successful until August 2013, when United States capabilities were exposed, resulting in al-Qa'ida limiting its communications in the cyber

domain.³⁷ Now the United States must find another cyber location to dispute command of communications.

Dispute of command is not limited to the military instrument of power. “No fly lists” issued by the Department of Homeland Security, monitoring of al-Qa’ida movements by the intelligence community, economic support to states where al-Qa’ida operates (Yemen and Iraq as examples), and United States officials convincing others that al-Qa’ida’s ideology is wrong are clear examples of the maritime principles applied to the economic, information, and diplomatic instruments. Each of these is a way to effectively isolate and disrupt al-Qa’ida operations without applying the full force of the military.

Limited War

Corbett commits some thought to limited war as an explanation of the nature of war. He wrote that limited wars depended on the amount of strength the belligerents are “able or willing to bring to bear at the decisive point.”³⁸ These wars do not depend on the armed strength of the conflicting sides. Rather they depend on the will to use force at the right place at the right time as a way to meet the political objective. Applying these ideas to maritime strategy, fleets cannot be everywhere on the oceans at one time, nor can armies or air forces. If the object of the policy is limited, then one should not apply the entire means. Corbett continues his limited war explanation by discussing the power of isolation and the power of securing a strong defense by not allowing a “strong counterstroke.”³⁹ When one is able to isolate the object, or fix them in place, one can strike at the lines of communication and reduce the means of the opponent to resist. On the defensive side, to ensure the enemy cannot apply a decisive blow is to

avoid the counterstroke. By mixing the offense and the defense, Corbett shows limited war as a variable condition applied where it best meets the objectives.

Corbett's ideas on limited war apply directly to the current fight against al-Qa'ida. Just as the enemy attempted to bring strength to a decisive point on September 11, 2001, the United States has been seeking the same opportunity.⁴⁰ The United States cannot be everywhere and is forced into the limited war Corbett describes. Rather, the United States seeks to isolate al-Qa'ida in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, and the Maghreb. Similarly to how a ship might disrupt sea lines of communication, the United States severs operational, financial, and information lines of communications as a way to disrupt the terrorist group. Corbett's warning about relative strength is truer in this case than in the past.

The United States enjoys disproportionate means and ways compared to al-Qa'ida yet chooses not to bring full force to bear. Applying all national means (money, military forces, law enforcement as examples) against Al Qaeda would expose the United States to the counterstroke Corbett mentioned, or worse yet make the country more vulnerable to other strategic blows. Instead, the United States has opted to bring its strength to bear at other decisive points, which may or may not have been exposed yet. That al-Qa'ida has not been successful is testament to the layered defense from military, diplomatic, border, and law enforcement activities.

The Way Ahead

Assuming the national security objective changes to "disrupt, dismantle, and make al-Qa'ida irrelevant," and given current fiscal constraints, the United States should seek to rebalance the ways it uses to protect itself from al-Qa'ida. With the ends, ways, and means in mind, the United States must adapt a maritime strategy as it moves to

make al-Qa'ida irrelevant. Several options arise when applying Corbett's principles of command, dispute, and limited war. Using cyberspace, more special operations forces, more unmanned aerial systems, developing partnerships, and a strong homeland defense all fall into the lanes of a maritime strategy.

Using cyberspace as a way to counter al-Qai'da planning is one of the more important methods to reach the strategic ends. The United States is very successful at monitoring, collecting, and analyzing data from computers, cell phone transmissions, and e-mails.⁴¹ Denying al-Qa'ida control of this medium cuts into their ability to plan and execute operations against the United States and its interests. Cyber domain dispute must be continued and pressed until the United States owns the advantage and gains command of cyber over al-Qa'ida. When the advantage is gained, the enemy is unable to attain their goals, thus rendering them irrelevant.

Special operations forces provide the ability to strike al-Qa'ida at the times and places desired by the United States. Analogous to the cruisers of the naval age, these light and lethal teams scan the environment, take a specific mission, and execute. Whether from a position of strength or on the defensive, special operators hold the enemy at risk all the time. By pinning down al-Qa'ida leadership and demonstrating the capability to locate, capture, or kill them, the special forces deny the enemy their required and desired freedom of movement. With continued and focused special operations against them, al-Qai'da cedes a large degree of battlespace and is unable or unwilling to present fighting forces in a decisive action. Just as the principle of command of the sea implies, when the enemy is unable to give battle, then the stronger should press for a final decision.

Unmanned aerial systems, like special operations forces, place the enemy at grave risk. Integrating the intelligence from the cyber, air, and land domains, unmanned aerial systems can deliver devastating blows to the enemy by increasing personal consequences. Moreover, these systems do not put friendly lives in danger as compared to forces on the ground. Although using these systems can cause political concerns, they have been effective at eliminating al-Qai'da leadership in Pakistan and Yemen.

As the United States reduces the size of its land forces, it must seek other ways to ensure capability to command or dispute the commons. A solution is to grow partnerships with states and organizations that share common interests, namely al-Qa'ida's downfall. In a naval sense, this would be similar to combining fleets in the North Atlantic in World War II. However, in this case, it is expanding the "fleet" to include other capabilities to operate together for the common goal. The United States uses its instruments of power to build and maintain these partnerships. By building partner capacity, sharing critical information, and providing economic assistance and development, the United States can expand its reach to maintain general command or dispute al-Qa'ida's ability to operate.

Corbett warns against the weaker side delivering a strong counterstroke. Therefore, the United States must continue to defend the homeland. If the homeland is held in extreme risk, the maritime principles suggest the fleet will return in order to build strength. The analog to current times is that more effort and resources might be diverted to the homeland, taking the focus away from expeditionary missions. Additionally, a weak homeland gives the enemy an advantage to be exploited. The current situation

implies the homeland is well-defended. This condition must remain if the strategy to counter al-Qa'ida is to succeed. The maritime strategy is incumbent on taking the fight to the enemy rather than remaining at home.

In all cases, the United States must press the advantage it currently enjoys in the fight against al-Qa'ida. Friedman writes that doing these actions quickly is important as it "prevents the enemy from dispersing his forces into the open ocean, where they can do enormous damage before they are tracked down and killed."⁴² By keeping the fight in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and other al-Qa'ida locations, the United States has been able to contain the problem. Considering al-Qa'ida operational areas from 2001-2004 (Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen) and from 2004-present (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, the Maghreb, Libya, Philippines, Thailand, and more), the influence area is expanding. If the al-Qa'ida problem is not solved, in time the al-Qa'ida fighters will be able to spread their ideology of violence to other locations, putting the United States at greater risk of attack with serious consequences.

Conclusion

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Martin Dempsey, recognized the strategy to combat terrorism is more than just going to fight in Afghanistan. In a discussion with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, he said,

What we've seen our adversaries do is...decentralize. They rarely mass against us any longer. They decentralize, they network, and they syndicate. They network using 21st century information technologies. And then they syndicate together--groups of state actors, non-state actors, criminal actors--and they come together and they pull apart based on moments of time when they want to find common purpose against us.⁴³

This decentralized approach the enemy takes no longer lends itself to a continental strategy where forces meet on the battlefield. With the reduction in military budget and

manpower, there is no choice but to adapt a maritime strategy to the current environment.

If national goals adjust away from al-Qa'ida's defeat as an objective, and balanced ways and means are followed, then a different strategy becomes more apparent. When the ends, ways, and means are aligned to fight an enemy operating in a "borderless" world across several domains, what results is a maritime strategy that looks strikingly similar to what Corbett wrote.

When maritime strategy concepts are expanded beyond the sea and military, a much greater opportunity arises for strategic leaders to think about how to disrupt, dismantle, and make al-Qa'ida and their affiliates irrelevant. Applying maritime strategy ideas to the whole of government using all of the instruments of national power makes the strategy even more powerful. As land power reductions begin, the verbiage of national leaders point to a maritime strategy. Indeed the seeds of maritime strategy are sown and are soon to be reaped. President Obama's quote at the beginning of this paper is an invitation to employ a modern maritime strategy. Now is the time to think differently and apply maritime theories to the modern situation. With a wider aperture, the maritime strategy can be applied not only to the fight against al-Qa'ida, but also to other national security issues.

Endnotes

¹ Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at National Defense University," National Defense University, Washington, DC, May 23, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/23/remarks-president-national-defense-university> (accessed February 23, 2014).

² While there are several ways to spell this word (al Qaeda, al-Qaida are other variants), the use of al-Qa'ida is found in the National Security Strategy. See Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, May 2010),

http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf (accessed February 22, 2014).

³ Ibid., 19.

⁴ Janet Napolitano, *Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Report: A Strategic Framework for a Secure Homeland* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, February 2010), 9, http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/qhsr_report.pdf (accessed February 22, 2014).

⁵ The phrase “continental strategy” is taken from J.C. Wylie as he describes a use of armed forces as the primary means to gain control over the enemy and is directed along a central land axis. The primary factor in using this term is the “land” axis, which separates this from a maritime strategy. See J. C. Wylie, *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control* (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute Press, 1967), 124.

⁶ Leon Panetta, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, January 2012), http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf (accessed February 20 2014).

⁷ Chuck Hagel, *Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, March 4, 2014), 8, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014_Quadrennial_Defense_Review.pdf (accessed February 25, 2014).

⁸ U.S. Department of the Army, *Terms and Military Symbols*, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1-02 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, September 24, 2013), 1-17.

⁹ Most notably the Revolutionary War, French and Indian War, War of 1812, Civil War, and Mexican War.

¹⁰ Authorization for Use of Military Force, Public Law 107-40. 107th Cong., 1st sess., September 18, 2001, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-107publ40/pdf/PLAW-107publ40.pdf> (accessed March 2, 2014).

¹¹ Hannah Fairfield, Kevin Quealy, and Archie Tse, “Troop Levels in Afghanistan Since 2001,” *New York Times Online*, October 1, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/10/01/world/middleeast/afghanistan-policy.html?_r=0 (accessed March 7, 2014).

¹² J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr., ed. “A Theory of Victory,” in *U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues*, 5th ed., Vol. I: *National Security Policy and Strategy* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, July 2012), 94-95, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubid=1109> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹³ Prudence does not allow for quantification of “effect.” Certainly the attacks on September 11, 2001 could be considered great effect. The Boston marathon suspects are allegedly inspired by al-Qa’ida, but killed three. The Christmas Day bomber, Shoe bomber, and Times Square bomber may have been considered a great effect had the attacks been executed properly.

¹⁴ Alfred T. Mahan, *Mahan on Naval Strategy: Selections from the Writings of Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan*, ed. John B. Hattendorf (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute Press, 1991), 31.

¹⁵ J. C. Wylie, *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control* (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute Press, 1967), 126.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Till, "Seapower in a Globalized World: Two Tendencies," in *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 2.

¹⁷ For a recent application of Corbett's ideas to the space domain, see John J. Klein, "Corbett in Orbit: A Maritime Model for Strategic Space Theory," *Naval War College Review* 57, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 59-71.

¹⁸ Most literature attributes Corbett's main thoughts as Clausewitzian. For an academic discussion on the comparison of Corbett to Clausewitz and the similarities and differences, see J. J. Widen, "Sir Julian Corbett and the Theoretical Study of War," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 1 (March 2007): 109-127.

¹⁹ Julian S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, ed. Eric J. Grove (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1988), 27.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

²¹ UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, *Global Governance and Governance of the Global Commons in the Global Partnership for Development Beyond 2015*, January 2013, 5-6, http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/thinkpieces/24_thinkpiece_global_governance.pdf (accessed March 4, 2014).

²² *Ibid.*, 5.

²³ Robert M. Gates, *National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, 2008), 13.

²⁴ The White House, *U.S. Policy Standards and Procedures for the Use of Force in Counterterrorism Operations Outside the United States and Areas of Active Hostilities* (Washington, DC: The White House, May 23, 2013), http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/uploads/2013.05.23_fact_sheet_on_ppg.pdf (accessed February 23, 2014).

²⁵ Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, 91.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁷ "Yemen Drone Strikes, Ambushes Kill 10," *Reuters*, March 3, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/03/us-yemen-violence-idUSBREA221YF20140303> (accessed March 5, 2014).

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²⁹ Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, 318.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 310.

³² *Ibid.*, 319.

³³ *Ibid.*, 320.

³⁴ Norman Friedman, *The US Maritime Strategy* (London: Jane's Publishing, 1988), 214.

³⁵ Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, 165.

³⁶ Timothy L. Thomas, "Al Qaeda and the Internet: The Danger of 'Cyberplanning,'" *Parameters* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 112-123.

³⁷ Eric Schmitt and Michael S. Schmidt, "Qaeda Plot Leak Has Undermined U.S. Intelligence," *New York Times Online*, September 29, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/30/us/qaeda-plot-leak-has-undermined-us-intelligence.html> (accessed March 5, 2014).

³⁸ Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, 58.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁰ Some might consider this attack as a counter-attack if it were conducted by a state as part of a larger war. But for al-Qa'ida, it was a major attack requiring greater-than-seen-before means. Indeed, it was a decisive point in that it awakened the "enemy" and put the United States on the defensive for some time.

⁴¹ Schmitt and Schmidt, "Qaeda Plot Leak Has Undermined U.S. Intelligence."

⁴² Friedman, *The US Maritime Strategy*, 214.

⁴³ GEN Martin Dempsey, "A Conversation with General Martin Dempsey," public speech, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC, May 1, 2012, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/05/01/conversation-with-general-martin-dempsey/acqo?reloadFlag=1> (accessed March 6, 2014).