20 The Erosion of Constraints in Armed-Group Warfare: Bloody Tactics and Vulnerable Targets

Andrea J. Dew

Since Alexander the Great's time, states and their militaries have been grappling with the threat to national security posed by armed groups. And, as other chapters in this volume discuss, history is replete with examples of armed groups—insurgents, terrorists, militias, and criminal groups—that have fought against each other, fought against states, and fought with states against other armed groups.

However, three trends since the end of the cold war—the proliferation of failed and failing states, globalized travel and trade networks, and advances in information technology—have increasingly made the threat from armed groups a high-level national security issue for many states.[1] Recall, for example, that it was an armed group—al Qaeda—that planned and executed the 9/11 attacks on the United States; armed groups in Iraq continue to wreak havoc on attempts to establish lasting peace and security; armed groups—the mujahideen—forced a superpower out of Afghanistan; and armed groups, including the resurgent Taliban, continue to plague NATO efforts to rebuild roads, schools, and infrastructure in that country.

The problem for states and their militaries in dealing with the threat from armed groups is not that these groups have overwhelming firepower or even overwhelming numbers. Rather, the problem is one of how states can maintain public support—domestic or international—for continuing the conflict when the targets and tactics selected by armed groups become increasingly bloody and horrific and when constraints and limitations on warfare by armed groups have been swept away.[2]

Given this context, the questions that animate this chapter are twofold. First, if future conflicts involving armed groups have the potential to become increasingly bloody

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Andrea J. Dew is currently an assistant professor for strategy and policy at the Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, and a senior research fellow for counter-terrorism studies at the Jebsen Counter-terrorism Center at the Fletcher School. She holds a BA in history from Southampton University, UK, and an MALD and PhD in international relations from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Boston, Massachusetts. Before joining the faculty of the Naval War College, she served as a research fellow at the Belfer Center for Science in International Affairs at Harvard University and a research associate for the International Security Studies Program at the Fletcher School. Recent publications include "Irregular Warfare, Armed Groups, and the Long War: A New Analytical Framework," in *Economics and Maritime Security: Implications for the 21st Century* (Naval War College, 2006); (coauthored with Richard Shultz) *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias: The Warriors of Contemporary Combat* (Columbia University Press, 2006); and (coauthored with Mohammad-Mahmoud Mohamedou) *Empowered Groups, Tested Laws, and Policy Options* (Harvard University, 2007).

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and protracted to the point that public support becomes significantly undermined, then what indicators warn us of the likelihood of this possibility? Second, if we can better predict the tactics, targets, degree of violence, and will to fight of armed groups, how does this help policy makers, intelligence analysts, and military planners to better plan for such conflicts and to better reassess goals and strategies during such conflicts?

The discussion in this chapter is based on analysis of four conflicts involving armed groups in Somalia, Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Iraq with additional discussion of Hezbollah's summer campaign against Israel in 2006. There are, of course, numerous other examples that could and should be included in a discussion of when conflicts involving armed groups might devolve into a protracted and bloody fight. However, given the current context of the global war on terror—the "long war" in current U.S. Department of Defense parlance—these conflicts in which states have fought armed groups provide valuable insights into how and why such an erosion of the constraints on warfare take place among armed groups and with what effect on whom.

THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the end of the cold war was heralded by many as the start of a new era of world peace. The reality of the last decade of the twentieth century and first decade of the twenty-first century, however, has been a rash of bloody conflicts that has stretched from Bosnia to central and Southeast Asia, across the Middle East and Latin America, and throughout Africa.[3]

Analysis of global patterns of conflict since the end of the cold war shows that modern conflict has been predominantly irregular and unconventional and internal and has often involved armed groups. Indeed, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies' Armed Conflict Database, armed groups have been involved in more than 75 conflicts between 1997 and 2007, and more than 750,000 people have died as a result of those conflicts.[4] Thus, it is argued here that conflict involving armed groups is one aspect of the current and future face of warfare that is here to stay.

The term "armed groups" includes insurgents, terrorists, militias, and criminal groups. These armed groups are characterized by their ability and willingness to challenge the authority and legitimacy of states and even the international system, and they can attack within and across state boundaries, and even globally. Such groups operate through clandestine organizations, depend on intelligence and counterintelligence capabilities, and mask their operations through denial and deception. These groups are enabled by globalization and information-age technologies; they employ violence in unconventional, irregular, and increasingly indiscriminate ways; and their operations often are not constrained by the laws and conventions of war. Moreover, their operations deliberately bypass the superior military power of nation-states to attack political, economic, and symbolic targets.[5]

The root causes of these irregular and unconventional conflicts are complex and often overlap, each cause exacerbating the others. In some areas in the world, weak, corrupt, and failing states are part of the problem.[6] The end of the cold war also unleashed powerful ethnic, ethno-national, religious, identity, and communal differences that have been manipulated by competing ethnic and religious elites to gain power.[7] In other areas

of the world, internal and transnational violence has been the route to state resources and power, secession, or group autonomy.[8]

ASSESSING ARMED GROUPS

That conventional militaries need to better understand irregular warfare against unconventional forces comes as no surprise to some branches of the military—the U.S. Marine Corps *Small Wars Manual,* for example, dates back to 1940, while British counterguerrilla strategies were developed from nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century experiences with armed uprisings in Afghanistan and Ireland, among other places.[9]

Since the end of the cold war, and in particular post-9/11, however, conventional militaries have increasingly found themselves facing armed groups motivated by messianic ideologies and willing to use every means at their disposal to attack the symbols of states at home and abroad. Not only have armed groups as diverse as the Chechen rebels and al Qaeda proved their willingness to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD), but armed groups are also using the Internet and information technologies to motivate and inspire a geographically diverse audience of new recruits and supporters. Internal conflicts of the types we have seen in Somalia, Chechnya, and Bosnia will continue to occur in the twenty-first century—irregular conflict will continue to challenge state legitimacy and authority. Moreover, these internal wars of the twenty-first century will continue to have transnational and even global dimensions characterized by the irregular and unconventional use of force by various types of armed groups.[10]

Even as conflicts involving armed groups continue to recur throughout the globe, conventional militaries and policy makers are still struggling to come to grips with how to fight armed groups. We know, for example, that the costs of conflicts involving armed groups can be high in terms of blood and treasure and have the potential to become increasingly costly as armed groups fight grinding wars of attrition in which there are few decisive victories and political goals are hard to attain and difficult to sustain. This is not to say that such conflicts are unwinnable; however, as these fights become more protracted the weakest part of our strategies against armed groups can be the ability to maintain domestic support for our part in the conflict. Moreover, the skillful use of information technologies and global media by armed groups has placed increasing pressure and focus on a state's ability to sustain popular support for such conflicts.

Considering this vulnerability, then, it becomes increasingly important to ask why constraints and limitations on tactics and targets erode and whether there are warning signs that states can use to reassess and adapt policy or strategy before the situation deteriorates. For example, as of 2008, more than six years after the initial salvos of the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, NATO forces are still finding it difficult to establish lasting peace and security in all areas of the state. This is all the more puzzling considering the initial gains—the rapid defeat and rout of the Taliban in 2001 and a relatively smooth transition to democratically elected government by 2002. What, then, can be done to better understand who these armed groups are, why they fight, and when conflict involving such groups can devolve into protracted and ever-more-unpopular conflicts?

THE EROSION OF CONSTRAINTS ON WARFARE

In order to fight unconventional enemies, we must, as Sun Tzu exhorts, know our enemies: we must understand their capabilities, their concepts of warfare, their culture of war and peace; from this information, we can learn how they fight.[11] In assessing armed groups it is also important to remember that many have emerged out of tribal, clan, religious, and other traditional identity divisions. Thus, the starting point to such an approach is to develop an understanding of the cultural foundations of armed groups. This can be achieved by understanding the values, institutions, and ways of thinking that persist generation after generation, and by understanding how culture and tradition influence the way armed groups think about, and fight, war.

An important first step in such an assessment is to acknowledge that warfare by armed groups is conducted differently, by different rules from Western warfare. Modern state militaries are bound by international laws of war and, for the most part, are sent to war for reasons Clausewitz could understand—to achieve policy goals. However, the incentives to fight for armed groups can also include a range of personal motivations such as honor, revenge, glory, and vendetta.

Moreover, as T. E. Lawrence noted, two tactics—the hit-and-run raid and the ambush—are particularly important to armed groups.[12] Afghan mujahideen employed them effectively against the Soviets, as have Iraqi insurgents against the United States. However, armed groups in places such as Somalia, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Iraq have diversified their tactics and targets. At some point in all four conflicts, armed groups have rejected traditional limitations on warfare and have specifically and consistently targeted noncombatants and nonmilitary targets. Some of these armed groups have also deliberately used traditionally protected places, such as mosques, churches, schools, and hospitals, as both targets and operational bases. Moreover, the unconventional repertoire now includes the desire to acquire WMD, the use of improvised explosive device (IED) car bombs, brutal terror tactics such as beheadings, roadside bombs, kidnappings, suicide bombings, and the torture and execution of prisoners. These have become widely used against military and civilian targets.[13]

Furthermore, these conflicts are often fought in suburban and urban settings, turning towns and cities into the new battlefields. After the Soviet Army withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, for example, armed groups, including the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, fought from street corner to street corner in Kabul for nearly three years, killing thousands of Afghans, turning thousands more into refugees, and reducing the city to rubble.[14]

Not only has the urbanization of conflict drawn an increasing number of new casualties into the line of fire, but some armed groups in places such as Somalia, Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Iraq have deliberately targeted noncombatants as part of their strategies. Indeed, one of the characteristics of irregular warfare has been the involvement of local populations, whether their support is active or passive. In Somalia, for example, during the 1993 firefight between Mohamed Farrah Aideed's forces and U.S. forces, Somalis deliberately used women as human shields and children as lookouts, knowing that U.S. rules of engagement would prohibit American forces from firing on unarmed noncombatants. Aideed's fighters had no such compunction.[15] In many cases, these

casualties—women, children, medics, journalists—are not accidental victims of a conflict beyond their control; rather, their deaths and injuries are the results of a deliberate strategy to target noncombatants.

Although the aftermath of these attacks on local populations in and of itself is bloody and awful, this erosion of the constraints on warfare also has broader strategic implications. When armed groups throw off traditional constraints on conflicts—their own rules of engagement—the conflict has the potential to become protracted, deeply destructive in terms of damage to infrastructure, disruptive to the local economy, and highly divisive, which can enflame political, religious, and clan rivalries.[16] Indeed, without traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms and limitations on tactics and targets, each attack may trigger an escalation of violence, blood feuds, and vendettas, and cease-fire agreements may be quickly undermined and discarded.[17]

The erosions of constraints on warfare are not just a problem for the local populations drawn into the conflict. Although figures vary as to whether conflicts that involve armed groups are bloodier than conventional conflicts, the use of these tactics and this kind of targeting by armed groups significantly undermines the ability of conventional forces to bring peace and stability to a conflict zone.[18] As discussed later, when conventional militaries and states fight these groups, the problem posed by the erosion of constraints on tactics and targets by armed groups is that the duration of the conflict can significantly increase at the same time that the public perception of the cost of fighting is also escalating. This perception can exist within the local population that may support or tolerate the armed groups, in addition to the larger national or regional audiences.[19]

The issue of how to win or maintain the support of multiple audiences is further complicated by the way that different actions play out to different populations. For example, while an incident that involves the death of local women and children and the destruction of a school in Iraq at the hands of a Shia militia may be met with some outrage in the United States, it may strengthen, rather than weaken, the resolve of the U.S. public to support continued U.S. involvement. On the other hand, it may further weaken confidence among Sunnis that the United States can provide for security. Finally, it may demonstrate to local Shia that a particular militia is the most dominant and therefore the most important to support in the region. This issue of how states can sustain popular support for a conflict involving armed groups is never easily addressed, and the erosion of constraints on tactics and targets only serves to complicate and exacerbate the issue.

Despite this pessimistic assessment of conflict involving armed groups, not all conflicts with armed groups devolve into such downward spirals of destructive violence. Indeed, most traditional cultures from which armed groups evolve have deeply embedded mores against such tactics and targeting. In Afghanistan, for example, tribes dependent on agriculture for eking out a living from poor soil have prohibitions against fighting during the planting and harvest seasons. Warfare is conducted away from villages, and women and children are not traditionally included in warfighting or as targets.[20] This begs the question, then, of why constraints and restraints are eroded among some armed groups. Considering the consequences of the erosion of constraints on tactics and targets, both for the local populations and for intervening states, it is important to consider

how such trends emerged, and whether there are any indicators that forewarn of the potential for such conflicts to devolve into bloody and intractable fights.

CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS: A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

Analysis of conflicts involving armed groups in Somalia, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Iraq suggests that there are a number of issues that contribute to the erosion of constraints in traditional warfare. Five of the most important influences are discussed below. These include (1) the degree of state cohesiveness and the extent to which a state is able to provide security and services to its people, (2) the roles and extents of involvement of external and transnational actors in internal conflicts, (3) the degree to which radicalized ideology—religious and sociopolitical—has pervaded traditional belief systems, (4) the degree to which information technology is being used as part of information operations during the conflict, and (5) the duration of conflict.

1. State Cohesiveness

At its most fundamental level, the purpose of a state is to ensure its own survival and then to ensure that it has the monopoly of legitimate violence over its own people.[21] After survival and security—internal and external—are provided for, successful states are then part of the mechanism that decides who gets what resources inside of a state. However, since the end of the cold war in particular, we have seen a dramatic rise in the number of states—from Sudan to Afghanistan, Yemen to Somalia—in which the authority and legitimacy of the central government has been challenged, overthrown, and delegitimized.[22]

The degree of state cohesiveness—the extent to which the central government has failed—can contribute to the erosion of constraints on targets and tactics among armed groups by first creating a power vacuum inside a state and at the peripheries that armed groups can seek to fill. It can also change the nature of conflicts involving armed groups from conflicts with limited objectives, such as revenge for the loss of life or livelihood, to conflicts in which the objectives become unlimited—such as control over vast oil fields, state revenues, or regime change. When the state is too weak to prevent rival armed groups from battling over the resources of a nation, and the stakes of being left out of the struggle for power become increasingly binary—do or die—then the traditional constraints on warfare can be swept away.[23]

Somalia is a case in point—Siad Barre in the 1980s used increasingly brutal and ruthless tactics to maintain his control over Somalia. One of his tactics was to undermine and kill clan elders as a way of silencing his critics and to disrupt the likelihood of organized resistance. In the short term his systematic campaign of violence helped him maintain his grip on Mogadishu, but it came at the price of destroying the clan councils—traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms that meted out punishments and negotiated settlements to conflicts. By the time the United Nations arrived in Mogadishu in 1992 on a humanitarian mission to provide food to Somalis caught up in the famine, the state had almost disintegrated, and security was nonexistent. Instead, rival armed groups, including Mohamed Farrah Aideed's Haber Gidir subclan, had carved the city up into conflict zones.[24]

It is important to note at this point, however, that the devolution of state authority and control does not necessarily equate to an automatic erosion of constraints on warfare and to bloody and protracted conflict. In the case of Somalia, for example, Siad Barre had deliberately dismantled these constraints as a means to further his own political and military power. Moreover, as discussed below, when armed groups fight for the control of state resources and to maintain security of their own areas of operations in a weak state, other factors can fan the flames of conflict and melt the bonds that constrain the use of violence and the selection of targets.

2. External and Transnational Actors

A second important factor in considering what influences erode the constraints on tactics and targets in conflict involving armed groups is the presence and role of external and transnational actors in internal conflicts. Outside actors can influence such conflicts in a number of different ways, including by providing external safe havens and materiel support for armed groups and by providing an alternative source of legitimacy and authority, which can further undermine the political authority of the state government. They can also contribute to the erosion of constraints on warfare by sustaining armed groups past the point of exhaustion—the point at which a group might be tempted to negotiate a settlement to consolidate gains or restore the status quo.

In the summer of 2006, for example, Hezbollah placed its Katusha rockets in residential buildings in southern Lebanon, knowing that when Israeli Defense Forces returned fire, they would kill ordinary Lebanese. The intention of Hezbollah in involving noncombatants in the conflict was severalfold—to lure Israel into overreacting and thus using the images of Lebanese women and children killed by Israeli retaliatory strikes on apartment buildings as part of a public information strategy against Israel.[25] Hezbollah also provided compensation and support for those injured by the rocket attacks—thereby strengthening its own support base in southern Lebanon and Beirut. It was emboldened, moreover, by the knowledge that it could expend its stockpile of rockets and other weapons in a conflict in which no territory was gained and in which the infrastructure of Lebanon was significantly damaged, because it was confident that outside sources—Syria and Iran—would help it resupply.[26]

3. The Role of Ideology

A third important factor in explaining the erosion of constraints on targets and tactics by armed groups is the degree to which groups are influenced by ideology—which can be both from internal sources and external sources. In the context of the "long war" we tend to think of this ideology as religious—in particular the extremist Salafi ideology that al Qaeda and associated movements (AQAM) used to exhort radical Muslims to join in the global jihad against other Muslims and non-Muslims alike.[27] Such a powerful ideology, fanned by religious leaders, can provide a unifying and inspirational motivation to fight and justification for the use and recruitment of suicide bombers and the targeting of schools, mosques, and hospitals.[28] In 2007, for example, al Qaeda in Mesopotamia claimed responsibility for suicide attacks in Iraq that targeted military and police personnel as well as women and children using attacks in open-air markets, recruiting stations, and mosques.[29]

However, it is not a foregone conclusion that radical ideology can completely overcome traditional constraints on targets and tactics. In southern Afghanistan, for example, resurgent Taliban forces, even with al Qaeda support, have found it much more difficult to overcome traditional repugnance toward the use of suicide bombers, and the suicide attacks that have been carried out have had, thus far, limited impact and limited casualties.[30] Thus, while considering the importance of ideology it is also important to note that a fourth element can help to amplify the impact of such ideologies: information technologies.

4. The Role of Information Technology

Most armed groups use public information strategies—strategic communications—as part of their irregular warfare repertoire. Armed groups use information operations to recruit and maintain support among local populations, in addition to using disinformation campaigns to undermine support for other armed groups or state governments.[31] Until recently, traditional media such as radio, television, and newspapers played an important role in the media strategies of armed groups, but the advent and availability of the Internet has provided a new level of complexity to the issue. For example, al Qaeda and associated groups have made extensive use of *jihadi* Web sites both as a conduit for and as an amplifier of radical messages to audiences far removed from conflicts. Sometimes called "Jihad-101," the network of extremist Web sites not only helps to disseminate knowledge about how to construct and where to place weapons such as improvised explosive devices but helps to elevate and glorify the deaths of those killed for the global jihad and motivate and generate new recruits. This has made the Internet a particularly useful tool for the recruitment of suicide bombers.[32]

Moreover, as counterterrorism efforts in Western Europe have shown, the relative anonymity of the Internet also provides an important tool for armed groups to disseminate their ideologies to wider audiences and makes countering such ideologies increasingly difficult.[33]

5. Duration of Conflict

Finally, an important element that contributes to the erosion of constraints on targets and tactics by armed groups is the duration of the conflict. This element of time can take several forms—for example, armed groups in Chechnya have been fighting against Russian forces for more than 200 years. That experience, coupled with repeated political betrayals, adds to the ferocity of the current Chechen-Russia conflict, in which Chechen groups have targeted schools—Beslan in 2005—and used women suicide bombers—the so-called Chechen Black Widows involved in holding a theater hostage in Moscow in 2002.[34]

The duration of the conflict can also be a factor even if the armed group has not been fighting the same enemy for a prolonged period. In Somalia, for example, UN and U.S. forces walked into an ongoing conflict between Somali clans that had been smoldering since the fall of Siad Barre's regime in January 1991. As noted previously, Siad Barre had deliberately undermined the institutions that regulated and constrained conflict and by the time UN peacekeepers arrived in 1992, armed groups were already fighting for influences, power, and resources in Mogadishu. Again, this is not to argue that all extended conflicts involving armed groups devolve into unrestrained and unrestricted conflicts in

which the costs of conflicts spiral upward, but it is important to consider the extent to which the duration of the current or previous conflicts can contribute to this trend.

PREPARING, PLANNING, AND REASSESSING CONFLICT WITH ARMED GROUPS

This chapter considered what traditional constraints exist in armed-group conflict and discussed the factors that contribute to the erosion of traditional constraints during conflict. The conclusions, discussed above, are that traditional constraints on tactics and targets, such as not targeting women and children; using mediation to resolve blood vendettas; and keeping conflict away from hospitals, schools, and religious centers, can become dangerously eroded in conflicts involving armed groups. In broad-brush terms, the erosion of constraints on targets and tactics can be partially explained by a combination of factors that includes weak or failed central state authority, the intrusion of external and transnational actors in internal conflicts, the radicalization of extremist ideology, the use of information technology to disseminate ideologies and ideas, and the duration of conflicts.

While it is important to note that the existence of any or all of these factors does not predict the erosion of constraints and limitations in warfare, they do help us to assess the potential for conflicts involving armed groups to escalate in terms of duration and cost. This becomes important at three different levels—first, it helps intelligence analysis develop more accurate assessments of the threats posed by armed groups. Second, it helps policy makers, intelligence analysts, and military planners to develop more realistic goals and strategies for conflicts involving armed groups. And third, understanding the influence of these factors on the way that armed groups fight can help decision makers to recognize when it is time to reassess and adapt—the point at which conflict involving armed groups has the potential to or has already started to escalate from limited and controllable goals and costs to unlimited goals and spiraling costs.[35]

Taking these implications one by one, the first benefit of developing tools to identifying some of the factors that erode the constraints on conflict involving armed groups is that it helps states develop better intelligence capabilities about armed groups. This helps to provide policy makers, military planners, and intelligence analysts at the planning and assessment stage before a conflict starts better information about how a group will fight and to what extent it might disrupt long-term stability and reconstruction activities, break cease-fires, or target aid workers.

This becomes particularly important in places such as Afghanistan, for example, in which, as of 2008, a patchwork of power and patronage networks both enables and restricts reconstruction work. As the Taliban turn increasingly to criminal activities—most notably the sale of poppy harvests to international heroin networks—their long-term contacts with outside actors—al Qaeda—and extremist ideologies increase the likelihood that they will use suicide bombers to attack reconstruction and poppy eradication efforts. In contrast, in northern areas, absent an invading or occupying force, there has been a resurgence of the traditional methods of resolving local conflicts without warfare, including the use of *jirgas*—councils of elders—and warlords-turned-local-governors to control the escalation of conflicts.[36]

There are no easy answers for Afghanistan, nor are there instant one-size-fits-all solutions to understanding when armed groups will eschew their own constraints on tactics and targets. However, by studying the five factors discussed above together with analysis of an armed group's area of operations, command and control structures, motivations, traditions, and cultures, we have a better chance at assessing and mitigating the security risks it poses.

Second, understanding what factors suggest that conflict involving armed groups might escalate or become protracted with no decisive victories and clear end points may help policy makers and planners to decide their policy goals and strategies. Indeed, a clearer understanding of what factors affect the erosion of constraints on tactics and targets, and the relation between escalating costs and public support, may lead them to reconsider the cost of such conflicts—in blood and treasure—in relation to their policy goals.[37] Such an understanding may also help policy makers and strategists better decide which instruments of national power—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic—to apply to a problem.

Finally, during a conflict, if we understand the factors that can explain the tactics, targets, degree of violence, and will to fight of armed groups, this may also help policy analysts, military planners, and intelligence analysts to reassess their current goals and strategies. For example, if we can determine why an armed group has moved over time from traditional hit-and-run ambushes of military forces to a sustained campaign of kidnapping of civilians for ransom, as has been the case for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in Colombia, then we may have a better understanding of whether the group is losing its ideological grip on local populations and thus could be vulnerable to sustained campaigns to win the hearts and minds of its supporters.[38] This becomes even more important in Iraq, where the shifting balances of power between Sunni and Shia militias and the intervention of outside actors such as al Qaeda and Iran make it vital to constantly reassess what implications shifts in tactics and targets by armed groups have on Iraqi national stability and the support of Iraqi and U.S. populations for continued U.S. presence.[39]

In conclusion, conflicts cost resources—blood and treasure—and the ability of states to wage warfare can be severely curtailed by lack of support at home for the expenditure of resources on a long, drawn-out conflict. Indeed, one of the deliberate strategies of armed groups facing conventional militaries is to escalate the cost of the conflict to the state by prolonging the duration of the conflict.[40] States have a range of strategic options available to them—from cooperation to conflict—when it comes to conflicts involving armed groups, and any tools we develop to more realistically assess which strategies might be successful can only improve our still-rudimentary policy and strategy discussions on how to win such conflicts.

NOTES

1. This is drawn from more extensive original research published in Richard H. Shultz, Jr., and Andrea J. Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias: The Warriors of Contemporary Combat* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006).
2. At this point it is important to emphasize that the threat from armed groups is not new, that most states understand that conflict with armed groups has the potential to be both bloody and protracted, and that the

erosion of constraints on warfare is not a new phenomenon. What is new, however, is the degree to which armed groups are able to target the ability of states to maintain popular support for such a conflict. As discussed later, a number of influences, none of which are easily countered, exacerbate this ability.

3. Project Ploughshares, *Armed Conflicts Report* (Waterloo, Canada: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2006).

4. The Uppsala Conflict Data Programme defines a "major armed conflict" as the use of armed force between the military forces of two or more governments, or of one government and at least one organized armed group, resulting in the battle-related deaths of at least 1000 people in any single calendar year and in which the incompatibility concerns control of government and/or territory. See www.pcr.uu.se/database/ (accessed 14 January 2008). One of the most respected databases that tracks statistics related to conflicts involving armed groups is the International Institute for Strategic Studies' Armed Conflict Database, which is available from www.iiss.org (accessed 14 January 2008).

5. Summarized from Shultz and Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias,* 259–70. For one of a number of recent studies criticizing U.S. failure to distinguish among the specific armed-group threats in Iraq, see James A. Thomson to Donald H. Rumsfeld, 7 February 2005, available at www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nations/documents/rand_04_01.pdf (accessed 1 April 2005). See also Bradley Graham and Thomas E. Ricks, "Pentagon Blamed for Lack of Postwar Planning in Iraq," Washington Post, 1 April 2005, A3. See also discussion in Richard H. Shultz, Jr., Douglas Farah, and Itamara V. Lochard, *Armed Groups: A Tier-One Security Priority,* Institute for National Security Studies Occasional Paper 57 (Colorado Springs: U.S. Air Force Academy, 2004).

6. On weak and failing states, see, for example, Robert Rotberg, ed., *Why States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Chester Crocker, "Engaging Failing States," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2003; I. William Zartman, *Collapsed States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1997); Martin van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Robert Dorff, "Democratization and Failed States: The Challenge of Ungovernability," *Parameters,* Spring 1996.

7. Andrea J. Dew and Mohammad-Mahmoud Mohamedou, *Empowered Groups, Tested Laws, and Policy Options* (Cambridge, MA: Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research, Harvard University, 2007), available at www.tagsproject.org/ (accessed 13 October 2007).

8. For an in-depth discussion of arguments on root causes of internal conflict, see, for example, Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Ted Robert Gurr, *Minorities at Risk* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1993); K. J. Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Donald M. Snow, *Distant Thunder: Patterns of Conflict in the Developing World,* 2nd ed. (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1997); Donald M. Snow, *Uncivil Wars: International Security and the New Internal Conflicts* (Boulder, CO: Lynne-Rienner, 1996); William E. Odom, *On Internal War: American and Soviet Approaches to Third World Clients and Insurgents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); "Non-State Threats and Future Wars," special issue, *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 13, no. 2 (Autumn 2002); Monty Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2003* (College Park, MD: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, 2003); and Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

9. Available from www.smallwars.quantico.usmc.mil/sw_manual.asp (accessed 14 January 2008). On the British experience, see also David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (Holt Paperbacks, 2001).

10. The National Intelligence Council's *Global Trends 2015,* published in 2004, concludes that internal and transnational conflict will present a recurring cause of global instability and that these conflicts will become increasingly lethal. Weak and failing states will generate these conflicts, threatening the stability of a globalizing international system. See www.cia.gov/nic/pubs/2015_files/2015.htm.

11. On Sun Tzu, see Samuel B. Griffith, ed., *Sun Tzu: The Art of War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

12. See for example, T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), 200–24.

13. See discussion on suicide terrorism in Assaf Moghadam, "Suicide Terrorism, Occupation, and the Globalization of Martyrdom: A Critique of 'Dying to Win,'" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, December 2006, 707–29.

14. Shultz and Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias,* 179–81.
15. Ibid., 85–86.
16. See, for example, discussion in Thomas Mowle, "Iraq's Militia Problem," *Survival,* Autumn 2006, 41–55.
17. See, for example, discussion in Andrea J. Dew, "Irregular Warfare, Armed Groups, and the Long War: A New Analytical Framework," in *Economics and Maritime Security: Implications for the 21st Century,* ed. Richard M. Lloyd (Newport, RI: Naval War College, 2006), 103–107; and Montgomery McFate, "Iraq: The Social Context of IEDs," *Military Review,* May–June 2005, 37–41, available at www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/mcfate3.pdf.
18. For an empirical counterweight to the new war thesis, see Erik Melander, Magnus Öberg, and Jonathan Hall, *The "New Wars" Debate Revisited: An Empirical Evaluation of the Atrociousness of "New Wars,"* Uppsala Peace Research Papers 9 (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2006).
19. For example, in Afghanistan the United States not only has to consider how members of the local Afghan tribes view the actions of armed groups but also how the situation affects all Afghans, in addition to trying to maintain the support of other populations in the region, such as in Pakistan, and U.S. domestic support for continued U.S. presence.
20. Shultz and Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias,* 170–77.
21. Max Weber, "Politik als Beruf" (Politics as a Vocation) (speech 1918), in which he concludes that the state must be characterized by the means that it, and only it, has at its disposal: "[A] state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory."
22. "The Failed States Index," published by *Foreign Policy*, is one source of data on what has become an increasingly contested term. For the purposes of this research, the *Foreign Policy* definition is used:

    > A state that is failing has several attributes. One of the most common is the loss of physical control of its territory or a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Other attributes of state failure include the erosion of legitimate authority to make collective decisions, an inability to provide reasonable public services, and the inability to interact with other states as a full member of the international community. The 12 indicators cover a wide range of elements of the risk of state failure, such as extensive corruption and criminal behavior, inability to collect taxes or otherwise draw on citizen support, large-scale involuntary dislocation of the population, sharp economic decline, group-based inequality, institutionalized persecution or discrimination, severe demographic pressures, brain drain, and environmental decay. States can fail at varying rates through explosion, implosion, erosion, or invasion over different time periods.

    See "The Failed States Index 2007," *Foreign Policy,* July/August 2007, available at www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3865 (accessed 10 January 2008).
23. See, for example, discussion in Dew and Mohamedou, *Empowered Groups, Tested Laws, and Policy Options*, 18–19.
24. This was a long way from the controlled conflict of the traditionally pastoral Somali clans in which life—both human and animal—had a proscribed value that was honored by all sides in a limited conflict. Indeed, Aideed's clan saw the UN food shipments as one more resource up for grabs. He also had no compunction on using women and children ruthlessly as both lookouts and human shields.
25. Indeed Israel justified its air strikes against the northern Lebanese highways leading into Syria as an attempt to choke off resupply, and thereby not only bring the rocket attacks to an end, but limit the ability of Hezbollah to rearm after the conflict. Aboveground transportation, however, is only one way by which Hezbollah has been alleged to receive its arms shipments—some security analysts in the region claim there is an extensive network of tunnels dug for just this purpose. The result, for the purposes of our analysis, is that Hezbollah felt confident enough of its resupply that it was able to sustain a month-long barrage of rocket attacks on Israel across the southern Lebanese border in 2006. See, for example, discussion in Nicholas Blanford, "Call to Arms—Hizbullah's Efforts to Renew Weapons Supplies," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 May 2007, available at www.4janes.com (accessed 3 January 2008).

26. Again, it is not argued here that the mere existence of external influences and resources in and of itself is sufficient to cause the erosion of traditional constraints on tactics and targets among armed groups. However, such influences and resources can contribute to this trend.

27. It is important to note, of course, that the religious ideologies motivating armed groups are in no way limited to extremist Muslim ideologies, nor does the ideology have to be religious—they can be political or socioeconomic ideologies, too. The key issue here is the extent to which such an ideology is or can become the source of the justification for increasingly violent and bloody tactics and targeting.

28. The declassified key finding of the April 2006 National Intelligence Estimate notes that "the Iraq jihad is shaping a new generation of terrorist leaders and operatives[;] perceived jihadist success there would inspire more fighters to continue the struggle elsewhere." "Declassified Key Judgments of the National Intelligence Estimate 'Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States,' Dated April 2006," news release, 26 September 2006, www.dni.gov/press_releases/Declassified_NIE_Key_Judgments.pdf (accessed 31 October 2006).

29. See, for example, discussion in Bruce Hoffman, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 2 (March 2006): 103–21; and Lester W. Grau, "Something Old, Something New: Guerrillas, Terrorists, and Intelligence Analysis," *Military Review,* July–August 2004, 42–49, available at www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/grau.pdf.

30. Tom Koenigs, special representative of the UN secretary-general for Afghanistan, notes in his report on the issue that although there was a sharp increase in suicide attacks in Afghanistan from three in 2004 to 17 in 2005 to 123 in 2006, the number of civilian deaths was less than 100 in 2006. Moreover, by far the highest percentages of attacks in 2006 and 2007 (50 percent and 45 percent respectively) were in the southern region of Afghanistan, an area in which the Taliban were starting to stage a resurgence at this time. In addition, "In a May 2007 assessment, UNAMA analysts also concluded that recruitment for suicide attacks in the southeast region primarily takes place in madaris in Pakistan's North Waziristan and those associated with Jalaluddin Haqqani are of particular salience. In that assessment, UNAMA analysts found that in the southeast region suicide attackers are typically young males between the ages of 14 and 25, poor, introverted and impressionable." C. Christine Fair, *Suicide Attacks in Afghanistan (2001–2007)* (United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan, September 2007), 1–66, available at www.unama-afg.org/docs/_UN-Docs/UNAMA%20-%20SUICIDE%20ATTACKS%20STUDY%20-%20SEPT%209th%202007.pdf (accessed 4 January 2008).

31. Indeed, some armed groups such as Hezbollah have political wings and public spokespeople to shape public reactions and support for their actions and the responses by states such as Israel.

32. See, for example, discussion in Mohammed M. Hafez, "Martyrdom Mythology in Iraq: How Jihadists Frame Suicide Terrorism in Videos and Biographies," *Terrorism & Political Violence*, March 2007, 707–29.

33. See, for example, discussion in Lorenzo Vidino, "The Muslim Brotherhood's Conquest of Europe," *Middle East Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (Winter 2005), available at www.meforum.org/article/687 (accessed 15 January 2008).

34. For commentary and analysis on the attacks see, for example, Steven Lee Myers, "Russian Report Faults Rescue Efforts in Beslan," *New York Times,* 29 November 2005, available at www.nytimes.com/2005/11/29/international/europe/.

35. The U.S. experience in Somalia in 1992–1993 is a good example of this, whereby U.S. goals started out at the limited end of the spectrum—deliver food to the hungry and protect that food from armed groups—to something much less limited—kill or capture Aideed!

36. See, for example, discussion in Rubin Barnett, "Still Ours to Lose: Afghanistan on the Brink," testimony before the House Committee on International Relations and the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 109th Cong., 2nd sess., September 2006, available at www.cfr.org/publication/11486/still_ours_to_lose.html.

37. Would, for example, the United Nations have intervened in Somalia in 1992 if policy makers had had a clearer understanding of the cost the local militias would exact from international peacekeepers and the U.S. military? The answer may well have been the same, especially considering the strong international media pressure on the UN to respond, but perhaps different strategies may have been used and greater pressure placed

on providing UN and U.S. personnel with better intelligence assessments of the local armed groups vying for power in Mogadishu.

38. See, for example, Max Manwaring, *Nonstate Actors in Colombia: Threats and Response* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute of the Army War College, 2002), available at www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub16.pdf; and discussion in Stephanie Hanson, "FARC, ELN: Colombia's Left-Wing Guerrillas," Council on Foreign Relations, 11 March 2008, www.cfr.org/publication/9272/.
39. For an excellent example of a regional intelligence assessment that includes shifts in tactics and targets see Patrick Lang et al., "HUMINT in Counterinsurgency," app. 3 in *Iraq Tribal Study—Al-Anbar Governorate: The Albu Fahd Tribe, the Albu Mahal Tribe and the Albu Issa Tribe* (Quantum Research International, 2006), available at turcopolier.typepad.com/the_athenaeum/files/iraq_tribal_study_070907.pdf.
40. For example, during the Soviet-Afghan War in the 1980s, one of the goals of the mujahideen was to inflict multiple demoralizing blows on the Soviet Army with the goal of forcing its political masters in Moscow to withdraw. While no single sniper attack or convoy ambush provided a decisive victory for the mujahideen, the cumulative effect of the grinding war of attrition made the war deeply unpopular in the Soviet Union.