A Strategic and Tactical Analysis of al-Qaeda

Description

Or: What do the terrorists, the Japanese in WWII, cell phones, CAP actions in Vietnam and recent Army recruiting woes have in commonâ€¦

Point of Pondering #1.

As I sat in traffic today, a few things came to mind that may be the reason we are seeing some shifts in the attack patterns of al-Qaeda this past few months.

I guess the thinking on the topic began with this post over on Chapomaticâ€™s blog. It was a one-liner, which ends with:

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> â€œThat much effort indicates to me that these guys donÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t currently have usable WMD.â€•

That struck me as not necessarily correct under the circumstances, so I left this comment:

> â€œorÃ¢â‚¬Â¦alternatively, they still think they may not be ready to be completely exterminated, after being hunted down like rabid dogs. They may see this Ã¢â‚¬Å“level of violenceÃ¢â‚¬Â• can still get them a pass from those who keep saying itÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s all illegal. IÃ¢â‚¬â„¢d bet even the nay sayers, well, maybe half of them, would come around to GWBÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s view and measures as acceptable if a dirty bomb, or bio/chem agents are releasedÃ¢â‚¬Â¦which would put the polls at about 75% saying Ã¢â‚¬Å“kill the bums!Ã¢â‚¬Â• Kind of hard to say there isnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t a Ã¢â‚¬Å“mandateÃ¢â‚¬Â• when your polls are that highÃ¢â‚¬Â¦the gloves would come off at that point, and I suspect they know they cannot stand a full court press.
>
> A real, no kidding WMD, complete with destruction of Ã¢â‚¬Å“Biblical proportions,Ã¢â‚¬Â• would most likely shift the WorldÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s opinions completely against them.
>
> (IÃ¢â‚¬â„¢m no intel guy, but) The exact opposite of this briefing may not be discountedÃ¢â‚¬Â¦ â€œ

These terrible, yet small scale attacks, we have been seeing are noteworthy in that they hits the media like the tsunami last Dec 26th, and get the attention up, yet the outward sentiment of the world still stays latched on the â€œBush Lied, People Diedâ€• and â€œWhere are the WMDEEEEEEEESSSSSS???????â€• themes.

As I noted above, I think the use of a WMD, of any degree, would suddenly cause a reaction they know they canâ€™t afford.

Point of pondering #2:

Until the comment today about how the London bombs appeared to have all been triggered by cell phones, I hadnâ€™t really stopped to think about the fact that this is a common tactic of the terrorists in Iraq right now. The news reports of the military finding a bomb or IED making lab, usually in a house somewhere, contains cell phones in the listing of materials found. One picture I saw a few months back was a soldierâ€™s hand holding a cell phone with the annotation â€œ1 Missed Callâ€• on the phoneâ€™s LCD. The phone had wires hanging out of it that werenâ€™t for better reception. They use this triggering tactic regularly.

Why the interest in the cell phones? Well, simple. If you see the masses, or the attendees at the videoed beheadings, there is usually plenty of indication they are willing to die for Allah. We have repeatedly heard, and can find it supported in the Koran, that to die in a declared holy war for Allah will get you admitted to paradise. If thatâ€™s the case, we know jihad has been declared in about 4 hundred and eleven different ways against â€œThe Crusadersâ€• (which would literally include England, and never did include the United States of America, as were just hadnâ€™t found the place yet), so why are they not lining up and saying: â€œMohammed, put me in! Come on, put me in, just this time, you know I can do it for the team!â€•

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Simple: The use of the cell phones allows them to keep the trained fighters for another day.

Itâ€™s all about resource management, which is mostly what a commander in the field does. Itâ€™s nice to have a plan, and then gather the logistical support for the execution, but if the bad guys donâ€™t follow your plan, you may come up a little short. In this case, I think there are two dynamics at play here.

Point of pondering #2A.

The first condition is I think the terrorists have seen the opinion tide shifting in their favor. I wonâ€™t belabor the world mediaâ€™s love affair here, but they, as does anyone, gather strength to endure by seeing they and their cause being praised. The problem is, there arenâ€™t enough â€œresourcesâ€• (read people willing to blow themselves up to head for paradise), coupled with the fact that the media hasnâ€™t caused the US and itâ€™s collation countries to capitulate. They have to hang on. Itâ€™s sort of like the point in many war movies, when the platoon/company is surrounded and the enemy is chomping at the bit to overrun them, and some cigar chomping master sergeant or company commander yells for everyone to conserve ammo and only shoot what you know you can hit. In this case the ammo is a humanized version of the smart bomb (smartness may be debatable, but letâ€™s leave that to another post). I think they are running low. Using cell phones improves the possibility of having more seasoned fighters around for the final push.

Point of pondering 2B.

So, whatâ€™s up with that? Well, letâ€™s take a short trip to the near past, like two months ago. What was the almost daily screeching from the papers and HBM about? Yep, you got it: â€œArmy Not meeting Recruiting Goals.â€• War is a tough business and itâ€™s not just some of the youth of America that sometimes balk at the call. Where are the demanding headlines in the world press, demanding to know what the actual numbers targeted (sorry, but we use that word about our recruiting plans) to get signed up and how many actually did. I want to know if their recruiters are treated to an

un-video taped beheading if they fail on a monthly goal. I bet thereâ€™s a massive cover-up on this issue amongst the jihadisâ€¦

The â€œrecruiting numbersâ€• may be lower (assuming my analysis that they are missing their numbers is correct) based on another reason. In â€œOur Own Worst Enemyâ€• by William Lederer, the author tells the story of a Marine unit that gets assigned to work security for a Vietnamese village. They model their interaction with the villagers from the guidance of the â€œSmall Wars Manualâ€• the Marines figured out after having served in Central America in the early 1900s. Anyhow, the Marines not only provided protection, they showed the villagers how to farm and grow livestock more effectively, then there is surplus over the families needs, so they form a little co-op and take the surplus to market and then they had extra hard cash to use to then do more and make more. Great story.

This links in with this discussion because, as we have also seen in Iraq, over time, the villagers start â€œratting outâ€• the VC, telling the Marines when the attacks are coming. The village bonded with their Marine protectors and mentors. The best part of the story is what I think applies here. The Viet Cong locals would slip back into the village at night. Their friends would tell them all the things the Marines had helped them to learn, and how they actually were improving their farms and making some money. The VC had been promising this type of thing for a long time, but it was the young men of the USMC that delivered on the promise.

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As we see Iraq rebuilding itself, with commerce developing, and people being able to speak and interact freely, Iâ€™m sure some of the â€œrecruitsâ€• are having second thoughts. When we hear stories of al-Qaeda recruiters killing off family members in order to get people to come and join the jihad, Iâ€™d say they are pretty well beat. The VC ended up doing that, and that sort of recruiting has an exceptionally low â€œ1st Term Retentionâ€• number associated with itâ€¦like about 0% in any oneâ€™s armed force.

Point of pondering #3.

Maybe the jihadis took some time to look into the whole suicide bomber deal by reading up on another recent example in world history. I am assuming they did some course work in the â€œDivine Windâ€• work of the Japanese in WWII. If they studied this well, they would see a few interesting things, not the least of which was JAPAN LOST! (thatâ€™s a no cost clue). Another real issue in Japan was that some senior and middle grade officers strongly (well, as strongly as they could) lobbied against the concept, the dissenting side largely being the pilots. Their argument was, if you took enough time to train them to fly (and it was kind of like the 2001 bombers, very little, just enough to get you to the target), then you should use them as a â€œreusable resource.â€• Using them once was only going to help so long, then the Chop (supply officer) is saying â€œsorry, no got!â€• Thatâ€™s what happened to the Japanese Navy. By the Battle Off Samar, the Japanese aircraft carriers had pretty much been relegated to being just large targets for the Navy bombers, as they had no pilots to fly from them. They were the decoy to get Bull Halsey to leave the area, while Admiral Kurita went with his surface battleships, cruisers and destroyers to try and spoil MacArthurâ€™s landing at Leyte Gulf.

I think the jihadis have come to understand this lesson: Manage your resources conservatively from the Japanese example.

Summary: I think the boys are on the ropes, but still have the fight in them. I think they are good students of the technical aspects of killing, with some mastery of phsychology and public relations. I

think they are very weak historians, as they someone how seem to be repeating many of the mistakes of the past.

Got all that? Clear as mud? Comments?

Thanks to Mudville Gazette for the Open Posts!

Update 11:50PM EDT:

If youâ€™d like a detailed analysis of the London Bombing itself, get your coffee and then click on this linkâ€¦good stuff from Kung fu Katâ€¦

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1. Geo-Political
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admin