

MILITARY POWER ALONE NOT ANSWER

# Underlying issues vital in terror war

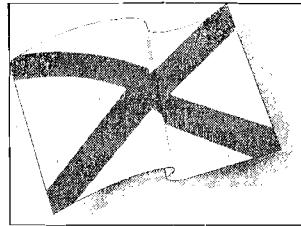
By Nicholas Sarantakes

Can the war on terrorism be won? This question is a simple one, but the answer unfortunately is rather complicated. Various statements that President George W. Bush and Sen. John Kerry have made on this matter during the presidential campaign indicate it is an issue that perplexes even those operating at the highest level.

The short answer to the question is "no." A longer answer is "yes and no."

What does that mean? Well, if the "global war on terrorism" is indeed what the name implies, if America is on a worldwide crusade to kill off every terrorist on the planet, then the effort is probably beyond the power of even the United States.

The problem is that terrorism is a means to an end. It is a strategy that the weak use against the strong. As long as there are disgruntled groups and individuals out there without much power and a willingness to use violence against people with whom they have a grievance, there will be terrorists and terrorism. Fighting a war on terrorism is like fighting a war on war. An effort to eradicate this method is a fool's errand.



## Alabama Voices

Never mind the fact that a terrorist is often in the eye of the beholder and that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. Point of fact: the biggest terrorist threat to our British allies is the Irish Republican Army, and the IRA draws a good deal of its funding from Irish-Americans. If the U.S. government wanted to put the IRA out of business all it would have to do is to shut down about eight Irish pubs in Boston that serve as fundraisers for these terrorists and their front organizations.

The longer answer comes from the fact that the global war on terrorism is not what the name implies. A more accurate title would be the "global war on al-Qaida and its friends." Can we win this war? Without a doubt. The United States has far more resources than

these terrorists and the resolve. While people might have reservations about the war in Iraq, there is no significant group that questions the effort in Afghanistan. Americans are determined for understandable reasons to have retribution for Sept. 11.

In fact, we are probably closer to victory than we think. The al-Qaida that existed on Sept. 10, 2001, has suffered a number of heavy blows. Most of its leadership is gone. Even if Osama bin Laden is still out there, his ability to direct his organization is suspect. In short, this effort is not over, but it is going well for us.

The bad news is that this terrorist organization is still dangerous, and capable of rebuilding itself. More importantly, it needs only a few resources and can still inflict a lot of damage even with a fraction of its original size. Unlike traditional wars between nation-states, we have a much more absolute goal. Destroying, rather than defeating, al-Qaida is really the only objective the United States can have. As a result, there will be no negotiated settlement, no armistice, and no peace treaty. Victory requires that al-Qaida be totally eliminated.

Destroying this terrorist organization, while no simple thing, will be the easiest part of this conflict. It is important to remember that this war like any other serves larger political interests. For example, in Vietnam Gen. William Westmoreland had more resources than the Viet Cong, inflicted numerous defeats on the enemy, and yet the United States was unable to turn operational success into political victory.

In the present the question we need to ask is, what good will it do us to kill everyone in al-Qaida, if we do nothing to address the larger issues that produced these terrorists? If no effort is made to resolve the underlying political, social, cultural, and economic disputes that bred extremist action, then other extremist organizations will find it quite easy to fill the place of al-Qaida and recruit new members. That type of development is something we will all want to avoid.

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