

**-Theory to Strategy-
How to Defeat al Qaeda in Iraq and around the Globe**



*A conceptual model to defeat terrorist and
high level criminal organizations*

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December 22, 2008 (revised)

Note: This document was certified UNCLASSIFIED by a Special Security Officer review, on 1 August 2008, followed by a secondary Special Security Officer review on 3 October 2008.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the Author 3
Introduction..... 4
The Bottom Line 5
Alibis 6
Understanding AQI Resiliency 8
 Figure 1. Conceptual Frame: “AQI Resiliency Cycle”..... 8
AQI Resiliency Characteristics..... 11
 Figure 2. Listing of AQI resiliency characteristics and their components..... 11
Next Step 13
 Figure 3. Conceptual Frame: “Defeat AQI Strategy Cycle” 13
References..... 155



Theory to Strategy – How to Defeat al Qaeda in Iraq and around the Globe

About the Author

Dr. Paul Chabot, a military intelligence officer working with U.S. and Coalition Special Forces returned from a tour of duty in Iraq in late 2008 and remains on active duty (as of the date of this report). In addition to his regular duties in Iraq, he found a need and voluntarily established and chaired, as collateral duty, the first of its kind AQI (al Qaeda in Iraq) working group which brought together leaders from around the war zone charged with analyzing and attacking AQI.

He has over fourteen years of law enforcement experience, seven years of service in the military intelligence community and served as a senior advisor in the White House for six-years. During his tenure he contributed to a number of Presidential strategies (i.e. National Drug Control Strategy, High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program Strategy, Methamphetamine Strategy, etc.) His doctoral work focused on organizational learning, human resource development and executive leadership. In 2008, he completed a dissertation studying organizational resiliency within international terrorist/drug organizations. The five-year study revealed valuable learning's to better combat and dismantle sophisticated terrorist organizations and served as a foundation for this strategy.

Introduction

The U.S., Coalition and Iraqi forces have made great progress in combating al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Today, AQI is severely damaged and limited in its operational potential. However, despite all best efforts, AQI has adjusted to internal and external pressures and remains a threat to the region and national security.

AQI fits the academic definition of a resilient organization. It's aware of challenges, continues to make sense of its environment, learns from failure, adjusts to difficulties and creates or uses resiliency characteristics to sustain itself in what I describe as a resiliency cycle. If U.S., Coalition and Iraqi pressure were to be released on AQI, it would reconstitute itself with a vengeance and wreak havoc throughout the region, yet again.

What this strategy proposes is to simultaneously attack each of AQI's resiliency characteristics by the asset best suited for that mission. As such, AQI will shrink further, much like applying pressure to all sides of a balloon. Results are measured, evaluated, reassessed and refocused. The process of attacking the resiliency characteristics begins again, thereby further shrinking the organization. This process repeats itself over and over, much like peeling back layers of an onion. Eventually, AQI will be so severely shrunk and damaged, that it is but remnants compared to its previous strength. It is at this stage, in its weakest form, that it is most susceptible to organizational failure.

This strategy can be a blue-print for fighting not only al Qaeda, but all terrorist organization including criminal/drug trafficking organizations and sophisticated street and prison gangs, worldwide. Simply, such horrific organizations must either adapt to pressures or collapse upon itself like a dying star. Those organizations able to sustain despite such pressure and survive, exhibit resiliency and therefore contain resiliency characteristics. It is these resiliency characteristics that we must focus our efforts upon to bring about the destruction of such evil organizations. It is a precise, focused strategy requiring leadership, resources and patience.

The Bottom Line

This qualitative study provides a framework for measuring success against al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) by applying and evaluating Coalition Forces (CF) resources (and their outcomes) aligned against AQI resiliency characteristics. CF will more clearly be able to discuss and articulate (to government and constituents) how AQI is being fought and dismantled. Resiliency characteristics were derived from a number of collection methods; findings were validated through a peer review process consisting of al Qaeda experts.

Defeating al Qaeda, worldwide, requires a separate strategy for each region infected by al Qaeda because each region is made up of a variety of different characteristics (i.e. political, cultural, economics, geography etc). Hence, this study begins that process and should be implemented and modeled around the globe, and without hesitation. The global growth and influence of al Qaeda can be systematically broken apart through the guidance provided in this study.

Alibis

- For this strategy to be successful it requires visibility and “buy-in” from *relevant* government leaders. Hence, this strategy first needs a high level “torch carrier” to rally executive level government officials to stand behind, and promote this study’s findings, and recommendations.
- This strategy does not recommend which, or in what manner, CF resources should be applied to each resiliency characteristic – that is best addressed through a cooperative Coalition effort. For success to be achieved, the full spectrum of resources must be identified and tracked for progress against AQI resiliency characteristics for future evaluation, adjustments, reporting and attack through a revolutionary process that diminishes AQI with each rotation, dismantling the networks ability to function.

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On Monday, May 19th 2008 a presentation to CF titled, “Attacking the Ridgeline” stated the following, “No campaign strategy on how to defeat AQI at national or operational level exists.” After further exploration, a comprehensive strategy to defeat AQI has not been identified (however, a number of *global* al Qaeda strategies do exist, but those reviewed are not focused specifically on AQI). Significant progress has made in combating AQI and efforts in place today in Iraq have severely limited their ability to fully function which is credit to the CF efforts. To further our efforts against AQI, I have created this framework for a strategy, which provides a detailed description of AQIs resiliency characteristics and how to best attack these sustainable attributes. CF resources aligned against these identified resiliency characteristics is the only sure way to dismantle the organization’s strengths, thereby creating a significantly diminished threat from the enemy as its organization evaporates. Additionally, such a strategy also provides CF with the opportunity to measure CF success against such characteristics, which can better assist future realignment of resources while also having a structure from which to report to Congress and the President exactly how AQI is being defeated. One very important caveat must not be understated. While the methods to derive the findings presented in this paper can be replicated in AQ threat regions, worldwide, the findings cannot. A separate study must be done in each region (of the world). That is accomplished by replicating the methodology. Lastly, it’s important to recognize that a significant CF effort exists which already attacks a number of these characteristics. To that aim, this study better organizes these efforts while exposing new targets and weaknesses for exploitation and attack.

Coalition Forces have made great strides in combating AQI. However, despite best efforts, the AQI network continues to operate by learning from its failures and setbacks. It may be uncomfortable to credit AQI for its survivability, but we must do so in order to better understand the organization we are fighting. Acknowledging the organization’s ability to persist can best be framed by describing AQI as a *resilient organization* (see pages 15 and forward for a clear understanding of organizational resiliency). From this standpoint, we can then move forward and identify resilient characteristics present and enact a plan that calls for applying strategy against each of the identified resiliency characteristics. In short, the organization can be better fought against by separating each of its strengths and tearing them down simultaneously (using the entire breadth and depth of the CF). Before this process can begin, we must first identify the AQI resiliency characteristics (listed later in this paper). In order to do this, let me first describe my model depicting organizational resiliency within the AQI organization.

Understanding AQI Resiliency

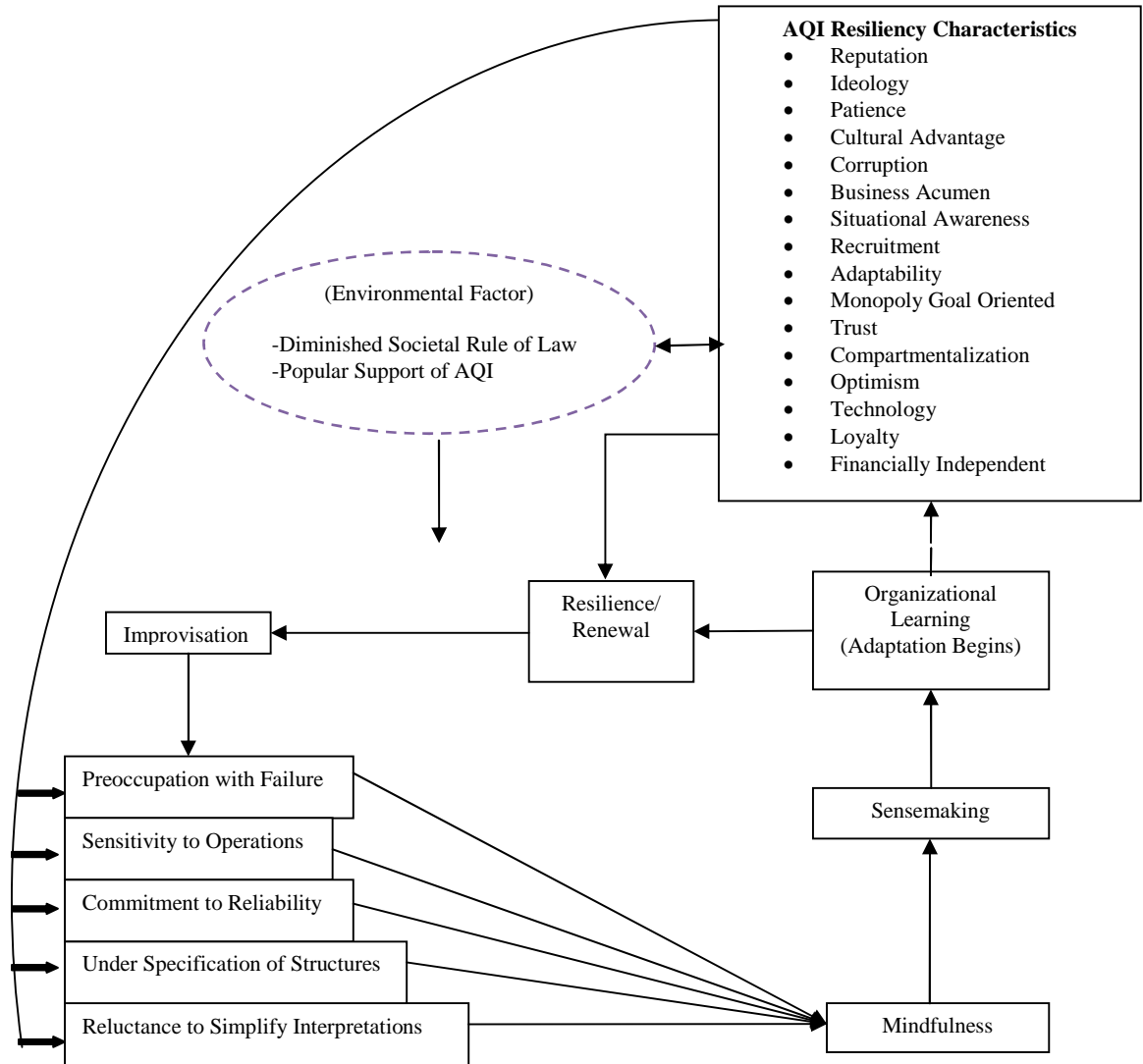


Figure 1. Conceptual Frame: “AQI Resiliency Cycle”

The simplest way to explain the resiliency cycle is for one to think back to being a child in a park playing with other children on the merry-go-round–style swings where children run circles pushing the circular object and other children remain on it for the ride. All along children are jumping on and off as it continues to maintain rotations. The conceptual frame above is much like that merry-go-round, which includes improvisation, the five constructs, and mindfulness, sensemaking, organizational learning, and resilience. Through each rotation, a characteristic becomes evident at the organizational learning construct, and the characteristic become a part of the organizational memory. The characteristic then remains while waiting for further rotations for others to join them. All along, the resiliency framework is affected by two environmental factors: diminished societal rule of law, and popular support of AQI, which has proven to be two important

factors for the survivability of AQI (historically, insurgencies fail when they no longer are able to obtain/maintain legitimacy and the support of the populace). The diminished rule of law in parts of Iraq allows the organization to thrive and build upon itself in those areas. The environmental factors can affect AQI resiliency efforts and their resiliency characteristics. However, only the resiliency characteristics (and not the resiliency universe, represented by the entire model) can affect the environmental factors because a number of the resiliency characters (all of which were formed through organizational learning) can alter, and have altered, the environmental factors (i.e., corruption of government and variables of the business acumen construct).

Uniquely, a portion of the resiliency characteristics relate back to the inputs for mindfulness. According to Rerup (2001), improvisation, which leads to the five mindfulness inputs, is hard to maintain because it constantly requires attention. What this study proves is that improvisation is maintained through the organization's consistent cycling through this framework, using the resiliency characteristics to support the five inputs to mindfulness. For example, AQI's resiliency characteristic of preoccupation with failure is enhanced by the resiliency characteristics of trust, loyalty recruitment, corruption, and reputation. Next, the second input of sensitivity to operations is affected by the characteristic of situational awareness. The third input, commitment to resilience, is supported by the organization's technology, monopoly goal-oriented structure, and optimism. The fourth input, under specification of structures, is supported by the characteristic of compartmentalization. Lastly, the final input, reluctance to simplify interpretations, is supported by the self-reliance and business acumen characteristics. Collectively, the entire organization demonstrates constant ability to adapt; therefore, the characteristic of adaptability is rightfully connected to all five mindfulness inputs.

Weick's (1993) study of the Mann Gulch disaster applies the idea of mindfulness—or, in this case, lack thereof—to a specific organization. Although the term “organization,” in the context of organizational resilience, is sometimes thought to include only companies, any group of people working together can constitute an organization. In Weick's study, the organization being studied was the crew of the smokejumpers at Mann Gulch. Weick's discussion of the Mann Gulch tragedy focused on the collapse of sensemaking, as well as what it takes to become a “resilient organization.” According to Weick, there are four sources of resiliency: (1) improvisation and bricolage (demonstrated in the Mann Gulch tragedy when the smokejumpers created an escape fire [setting a fire to burn up ground brush/fuel so that the firefighters can then proceed through this newly burned area prior to the approaching fire reaching them] to use); (2) virtual role systems (i.e., a social construction of reality, demonstrated in the Mann Gulch tragedy when the smokejumpers broke down rank barriers and made smart decisions); (3) having a mind-set of wisdom (i.e., learning from all experiences; and (4) respectful interaction (i.e., being able to influence each other). Although the Mann Gulch smokejumpers had two of the four sources of resiliency, the smokejumpers as a group ultimately failed to be resilient. The Mann Gulch disaster was “a case in which people were unable to negotiate strangeness. Frameworks and meanings destroyed rather than constructed one another” (p. 645). Weick saw a lost opportunity for resilience, which turned into a “deviation-amplifying feedback loop”—that is, a downward spiral of

failures based on repeated failures. “The colossal fire blowup in the Mann Gulch was shaped by mishaps that fitted together tighter and tighter until all became one and the same—a fateful blowup” (p. 648). Lessons are learned from this kind of tragedy and have helped form a plan for creating resilience within organizations. Weick (1979) postulates that organizations attempt to transform various forms of data into information that is understood for self-maintenance. By attacking and removing AQI resiliency characteristics, CF can have greater, and sustained success against an enemy proven to be adaptive to change.

Weick’s work on sensemaking (1988) strongly reflects sensitivity toward the knowledge-building process. Weick’s sensemaking translates into how individuals actively attempt to understand the world around us. Sensemaking develops a set of practices that aid in the understanding of acquired information. It references methods for building the context in which to place information so that the information is useable. In essence, Weick’s theory explains how to understand the process of organizing people from within an organization and how those individuals manage the data rather than rely on the structure of the organization itself.

AQI Resiliency Characteristics

1. **Reputation** (related components: brutality; successful attacks on CF and Iraqi Police/Military enforcement/government; revenge killings; witness/victim intimidation; community of fear, success margin)
2. **Ideology:** (related components: religious fanaticism, caliphate)
3. **Patience** (related components: hides, awaits opportunity)
4. **Cultural Advantage:** (related components: cultural dominance over CF though ethnic and religious footing, recruit local cultures, assimilates)
5. **Corruption** (related components: bribery; blackmail, legitimate business infiltration)
6. **Business acumen** (related components: ability to organize the operational structure; centralized leadership; decentralized lower structures; growth aggressiveness; accountability; leadership development; communication, financial strength)
7. **Situational awareness** (related components: intelligence collection; counterintelligence activity; reduce visibility when needed; deception tactics; infiltration of legitimate businesses; attention to minor details; diligent)
8. **Recruitment** (related components: quickly replenish ranks; higher salary than legitimate work; large organizational membership; member street and military smarts, influence the uneducated, vulnerable and demoralized; of similar ideology; skill sets)
9. **Adaptability** (related components: creative sophistication; opportunistic; uproot, reform and re-deploy, mobility)
10. **Monopoly Goal Orientation** (related components: control over operations; kill competitors/ those not agreeing with AQI philosophy; geographic control; infiltrate legitimate trade lines)
11. **Trust** (related components: minimal trust of outsiders; high family trust, self reliance)
12. **Compartmentalization** (related components: separation of org components and limited distribution of information)
13. **Optimism** (related components: sense of entitlement; confidence, legitimacy from public)
14. **Technology** (related components: speed of communications/ global network, use of media)
15. **Loyalty** (related components: internal discipline and obedience; control over personnel)
16. **Financially Independent** (related components: organized crime initiatives)

This is a "living document." These characteristics will change as AQI and CF adaptation occurs

Figure 2. Listing of AQI resiliency characteristics and their components

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These resiliency characteristics are the result of a culmination of both archival review and interview data, using the most stringent academic standards. These characteristics sustain the organization during times of significant pressure to collapse, but also remain during normal operational times when no such pressure exists. Although these characteristics are highlighted here, it remains highly important for the reader to remember that multiple additional strengths make up a number of these resiliency characteristics. The generalizing and narrowing down to the finest elements was an essential component of this study in order to help make sense of such significant and diverse data.

The resiliency characteristics were identified through qualitative methods, including a review of over 1400 documents, interviews with AQI professionals throughout the Iraq-theater, surveys (22 AQI analysts from around Iraq answering survey questions), open source documents, and confirmation (validation) through a review with al Qaeda experts. The characteristics include those which remain strong now, or were strong at one point within AQIs presence in Iraq. They are listed together because if CF pressure is relieved too quickly against a diminished resiliency characteristic, a high likelihood exists that AQI will adapt and re-grow that characteristic. By applying pressure at all angles, much like pushing on a balloon from all angles, we will further reduce the size (threat). Overtime, the shrinking of the organization will produce a more manageable threat for the Iraqi national forces. This effort can also be compared to “peeling away” the layers of an onion as it gets smaller through each rotation of CF attacks on AQIs resiliency characteristics.

Organization resiliency prevents organization dismantlement. The organization is able to learn from failure and apply methods to counter or limit its vulnerabilities. Organizational resiliency is not an end state, but rather an evolutionary and, at times, revolutionary cycle that allows an organization to better itself based on its ability to apply new learning to its way of conducting business. Organizational resiliency, as it turns out, is not in itself an applied technique, but is rather what one can define an organization as having obtained after demonstrating its ability to fight back (learn, adapt) to prevent catastrophic failure.

Organizational resiliency is achieved only through a number of phases described in the AQI resiliency framework (i.e., cycle). Organizational resiliency does not prevent organizational failure, as insinuated in the question, but rather organizational resiliency is the phase reached by implementing any number of AQI resiliency characteristics. AQI became resilient against a number of efforts to destroy it (although a number of CF actions have severely impacted AQI), and from each of these efforts, the organization’s leadership learned how to adapt and implemented the necessary change to survive. It is more accurate to describe the role that organizational resiliency plays within the AQI network by examining episodes of organizational hardship and the actions then taken by AQI. Therefore, organizational resiliency does not prevent failure; rather, it is a concept used to describe organizations, like AQI, that are able to survive any number of actions and practices by not failing when extreme conditions present a likelihood of organizational failure. Organizational resiliency can best be described and understood

through the lens of human beings. Resilient human beings are not resilient simply because they bounce back time and again from significant hardship, but rather, and more importantly, because they *take actions that lead to* their resiliency (Braverman, 2001). These actions—for both human beings and organizations—are the essence of resiliency.

Next Step

CF should align resources against these resiliency characteristics (in progress in many areas already, including the environmental factors of “diminished societal rule of law” and “popular support of AQI”) and measure each for success (i.e. performance measures of effectiveness), periodically, in order to update the public on progress and adjust to the changing behavior of AQI as it attempts to adapt to pressure. Each CF cycle is like peeling *away* the layers of an onion. With each cycle and evaluation, the organization (AQI) becomes smaller and smaller and less of a threat thereby making the handoff of responsibility manageable to the Iraqi national forces (much like the U.S. National Guard handing off responsibility to local officials after a catastrophic event).

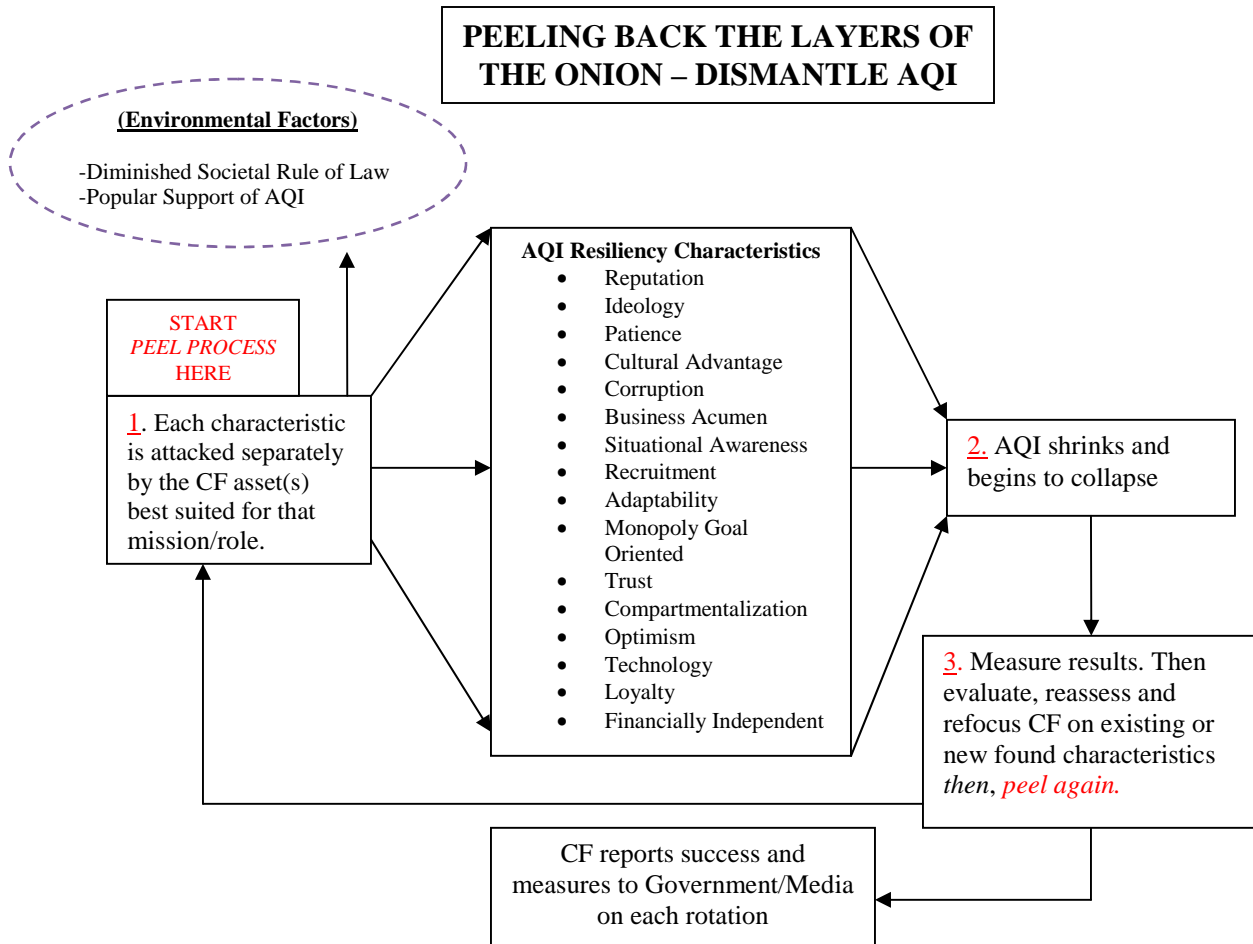


Figure 3. Conceptual Frame: “Defeat AQI Strategy Cycle”

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Such efforts will allow CF to fight smarter, not harder, and with fewer resources in the future. The lessons learned can then be applied to regions around the world where AQI runs and hides.

This study purposely avoided addressing CF resources needed to attack each resiliency characteristic. Such an effort is best attained by a general consensus of CF military leaders and civilian government organizations, based on their knowledge of resource-capabilities available in the theater of war. Such an exercise in consensus building is essential to the strategy's success and I'm confident such an exercise will identify the accurate resources that can be aligned, and then measures for success.

However, this study *does* propose that results must be measured (through a system of "performance measures of effectiveness," which is common within the U.S. Federal system of ensuring success with programs and objectives). The evaluation (completed yearly, at a minimum) of these results should lead to a reassessment of the activities, followed by refocusing on the remaining resiliency characteristics. The reassessment phase is also the ideal time to report success/findings to CF government and military leaders, including the media, and should be repeated at each interval in this cycle as the AQI network shrinks further with each revolution of attacks on the resiliency characteristics.

Note:

**Success in strengthening the conditions that allow for the environmental factors are required for CF success and Iraq stability. A weakened diminished rule of law and Iraqi popular support feeds AQIs ability to breathe and grow. A number of the resiliency characteristics, when diminished, will improve efforts at strengthening societal rule of law and lessen AQI popular support. Therefore, measuring the success of improving the rule of law and popular support is a worthy indicator of CF performance in attacking AQI's resiliency characteristics.*

*** Each AQI resiliency characteristic is made up of components. Therefore, when CF military leaders strategize the resources to attack each characteristic, the components must be the focus. The characteristics are simply headings used to help simplify the visual of all characteristics and their components.*

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