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How To Think Like a Terrorist

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West Point Shapes Curriculum to Educate Future Army Officers in an Age of Global Terrorism

Future military officers must be able to anticipate and respond effectively to the uncertainties of a changing technological, social, political, and economic world—a world in which the military will play an increasingly prominent role in combating terrorism.

New security environments and new roles and expectations require new forms of education for the military profession. At West Point, the U.S. Military Academy has developed the Combating Terrorism Center and a program minor in terrorism studies, the first academic minor program in West Point's history.



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This curriculum follows in West Point's longstanding tradition of developing America's future Army officers through three interweaving disciplines: physical fitness, academic knowledge, and what we call military officership. Concerning academics, the education of military officers requires an understanding of history, foreign policy, organizational behavior, and other disciplines relevant to the military profession. Thus, the multidisciplinary curriculum at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point is similar to most any other liberal arts college, with an extra layer of plain old discipline thrown in.

Such academic knowledge is essential in fighting the Global War on Terrorism. Today's military officers need a comprehensive grasp of asymmetric warfare principles and strategies. In addition to appreciating the enemy's strategies, motivations, goals, and tactics, officers must understand

how complex, networked, decentralized, loosely organized groups operate. From this understanding, the political, cultural, organizational and financial seams within those networked organizations can be found and exploited in order to degrade their operational capabilities.

Military officers require an appreciation for systems thinking and the phenomena of second- and third-order effects. Military education programs therefore must stay abreast of new developments in the sciences, especially in networks and complexity theory. Future strategic decision-makers and operational-level commanders also require new kinds of pattern recognition skills in order to cope with future multidimensional warfare.

In an asymmetric warfare environment, military officers at all levels require significant amounts of strategic-level situational awareness. They need to attack the enemy's strategy, not just the active fighters. At the same time, platoon sergeants are now making decisions that impact our nation's political and military strategy. Military officers must know several kinds of geographies and histories—physical, political, and cultural—in order to provide their soldiers with the necessary situational awareness. For example, knowing the political and cultural landscape is vital for understanding the range of possible tactics available to a local terrorist group, as well as historical grievances that may influence local support for insurgencies.

Equally important, military officers must understand the non-kinetic dimensions of today's conflicts. An insurgency is conducted in numerous locations simultaneously, including the information battlespace. Officers must think in terms of influence and com-

bined actions, as well as the impact that military operations will have on local perceptions. They must have a full appreciation of many forms of technology and understand what skill sets are needed for conducting strategic communications and cyber-warfare. At the same time, military professionals must remember to avoid overreliance on technology in their efforts to gain real situational awareness.

Officers must have a total grasp of the struggle, not just the terrorist acts. Their education must help them answer a number of new and important questions: Why is terrorism being used as a tactic? What are the political goals of this group? Is this part of an insurgency? What are the political, social, economic, cultural, and information dimensions of the conflict, as well as the security and military aspects? How do these interrelate?

Questions like these frame the lesson topics that are included in the terrorism courses at West Point.

The Study of Terrorism at West Point

The U.S. Military Academy developed a program of study in terrorism and counterterrorism after the events of Sept. 11, 2001.

The Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point opened in 2002 with a grant from Vincent Viola, a 1977 graduate of the Military Academy and former chairman of the New York Mercantile Exchange. The CTC is almost entirely funded by private donations. BG Russell Howard, USA (Ret.), former head of the department of social sciences, directed the center during its early years. Later, Wayne Downing, a retired general and former commander of all U.S. Special Forces, became the center's distinguished chair.

The CTC employs a team of civilian

and military faculty whose work is organized around four themes: terrorism, counterterrorism, homeland security, and weapons of mass destruction. Courses are offered to all upper-division cadets at West Point, and enrollment in these courses has skyrocketed into the hundreds.

In their courses, students learn the history of terrorism, using case studies to examine a diverse array of groups including anarchists, ethnic separatists, and religious extremists. They explore organizational strategies of terrorist groups and individual motivations of members, along with focusing on such dynamics as recruitment, training, ideology, and communication.

Cadets examine various facilitators of terrorism, such as transnational financial and criminal networks, and gain an appreciation for the organizational learning aspects of terrorist groups. They also examine local circumstances that support terrorism, including political, economic, and social conditions that existed before terrorism became a problem.

Naturally, recent trends in terrorism are covered in these courses, and cadets conduct their own research about events in Spain, Indonesia, Britain, Pakistan, Nigeria, Egypt, Israel, and, of course, Iraq.

Additionally, cadets learn about U.S. policy for combating terrorism. They examine the U.S. national security strategy, the strategy for combating terrorism, the homeland security strategy, and so forth. They also explore the seven key dimensions of national power, emphasizing that the

military is only one aspect to a counterterrorism strategy, the others being intelligence gathering and sharing, diplomacy, legal/law enforcement, information operations, finance, and economics.

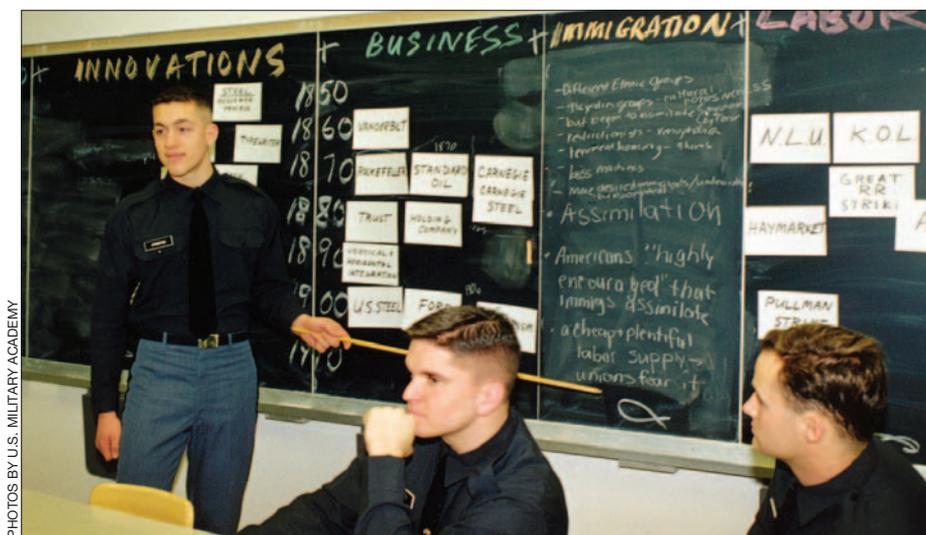
Overall, little time is spent discussing details of counterterrorism operations. Rather, the approach to the study of terrorism is built upon a conviction that training in tactics, techniques, and procedures in counterterrorism are only useful when leaders have acquired an appropriate intellectual background and can master the competencies. Thus, first and foremost, emphasis is on the need to be educated, critical thinkers about terrorism and the reasons why some groups adopt a strategy of terror as a means for achieving their objectives.

The Road Ahead

The world's first historian, Thucydides, wrote that "the nation

that makes a great distinction between its scholars and its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting done by fools." In the Global War on Terrorism, it is vital to link the scholars and the warriors, the intellectuals and the operators. This is the purpose of places such as the U.S. Academy at West Point, where the academic program produces scholarly warriors, and the courses on terrorism are designed to develop the competencies military officers must have in order to deal effectively with the global terrorist threat. ★

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PHOTOS BY U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY

West Point cadets take a mixture of courses in the humanities, social sciences, math, engineering, and the natural sciences. The content of these 30 required courses is organized around this set of 10 multidisciplinary academic program goals, based on the Academy's expectations for what an Army leader must know and be.

ARMY OFFICERS MUST

demonstrate

- creativity
- moral awareness
- commitment to continued intellectual development
- effective listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills

and understand

- culture
- history
- patterns of human behavior
- mathematics and science
- engineering and technology
- information technology

Source: *Educating Future Officers for a Changing World* (USMA Office of the Dean, 2002)

