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# Tracing the Tenets of Fourth Generation Warfare in Terrorist and Insurgent Groups

## The Case of al Qaeda

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### Abstract

One of the dominant theories of international politics, the theory of Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW), postulates that warfare in modern era has changed and its principle are very different from the features of conventional warfare which the states so far has been engaged in. The literatures produced by the terrorists (like Abu Musab al Suri's 'Call for a Global Islamic Resistance') have shown that the terrorists are fast adopting the tenets propounded by the theory of 4GW in an attempt to build a 'global jihad'. This article tries to trace the adherence of the tenets of 4GW by the terrorists and insurgent groups, focussing on the functioning and organisation of al Qaeda with the intention of suggesting that the state forces needs to reorient their strategies to fight this new mode of asymmetric warfare in the light of new principles governing Fourth Generation Warfare. The article argues that terrorists have been far more innovative and adaptive in adopting the tenets of 4GW and if the state forces (particularly Indian forces) fail to take the hint from the terrorists and the insurgents, the victory is likely to elude them in the near future.

### Introduction

An interesting feature of the theory of Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) happens to be the fact that its tenets or principles seems to be adhered more by the insurgents or the terrorists than by the forces fighting asymmetric warfare. If one reads the statement made by Al Suri,<sup>1</sup> one is surprised by his methodological rigour and consistency for revamping the dilapidated al Qaeda structure, although it is not limited to al Qaeda but aims at creating a 'global insurgency'. To quote him (Al-Suri 1990), 'I was searching for a method which the enemy has no way of aborting, even when he understands the method and its procedures, and arrests two-thirds of his operators' and his suggested therapeutics for 'global jihad' did not include any formal training for the recruits but only killing people in the organisation's name. He said, 'One could become a member of al Qaeda by a system of action, not a centralised, secret organisation for action' (Al-Suri 1990). The statement was made by al-Suri in the light of the arrest of majority of al Qaeda members by the US-led allied forces in the hills of Tora Bora. It is surprising to know that the world came to know of al-Suri only in late 2004 and that too when a Spanish investigations into the

Madrid train bombings disclosed his role as the mastermind behind the attack (Lia 2006). This was followed by an article in *Washington Post* in July 2005 which put the onus of bombing in Madrid, Casablanca, Istanbul and London on a person who was till now out of reach of the US investigating agency. Although the article did not disclose the identity of the person who was supposed to be behind these bombings but it did lay down that the culprits so far arrested were just the prawns in the hands of a person who till now had eluded arrest and whose brain was behind all these bombings. It was after this report that the head of European intelligence investigating agency made it public that a Syrian born jihadist named Abu Musab al-Suri was the mastermind behind the London attack on 7 July 2005. Although the investigating agency made public the name of al-Suri in 2005, it was not that they were unaware of the activities of al-Suri in private. In fact a number of media reports in 2004 and 2005 had hinted on the role of al-Suri in the Madrid attack of 11 March 2004 as well as of his role in assisting the hijackers of 11 September (Lia 2006). It was only after these reports that interest in knowing about al-Suri was aroused in the media, scholars and intelligence agencies; however this interest was restricted to western countries alone.

Al-Suri became important not just as any terrorist who was involved in a number of bomb attacks but as someone who was trying to build a system which would guide all future 'jihadis' through a concept of 'leaderless resistance'. In fact the idea of 'leaderless resistance' was propounded by Col Ulius Louis Amoss (1962), a deviation from how the theory of organisation operates in systems like army, navy and air forces. The danger with organisational systems is that they are pyramidal in structure and if one infiltrates a given level then he can easily destroy his immediate level and even cause destruction to other levels. It was in answer to the defects of the organisation system that Amoss (1962) suggested an alternative 'phantom cell' system or 'leaderless resistance' for those fighting against the state tyranny. In such a system the individual or group act independently and do not receive command from or report to any central headquarter or supreme leader. It is the common objective which binds them and also gives them incentives to retaliate. Information is not shared among and between these 'cells' through individuals or leaders but through means of communication and technological breakthroughs in information. As Black mentions, (Black 2006), 'Commander's intent and the movement's strategic planning will be disseminated not through structured channels, but rather through communiqués, web postings and televised statements'. Al-Suri was trying to reinforce the idea of 'leaderless resistance' into the fabric of 'global jihad'. Therefore what Al-Suri was suggesting was a reiteration of what Amoss had suggested way back in 1962 regarding the ways of fighting against the state. The western scholars as well as intelligence agencies were taken by surprise in this regard as they could never have imagined that something of an 'intellectual revolution' was being planned against them because these developments are suggestive of the amount of research being put into finding ways of challenging the state by the non-state actors.

Such analysis raises a question as to how much the counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism forces are prepared to meet such diffused and decentralised threats. In United States, at least the counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism experts are aware of such preparedness being thought of and adhered to by the terrorists (Black in one of his article tried to trace the tenets of Lind's formulation in terrorist's strategy of fighting against the states) but in India, one even doesn't find a discourse concerning the issue. Although there is recognition among the counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism forces that there is a need to change the strategy of fighting asymmetric warfare, which is very different from the conventional wars (which the security forces have so far been trained to fight), yet there doesn't seem to be any visible

change in the strategy of the security forces in fighting asymmetric warfare. Although Indian Army came out with its doctrine on sub-conventional warfare reflecting its preparedness for dealing with sub-conventional warfare, the doctrine does not reflect on the ways of dealing with 'phantom cell' operations being launched by the insurgents or terrorists, if it ever acquires the shape as propounded by al-Suri or Amoss. On the contrary, the terrorists and the insurgents have been fast in learning from the changes in warfare, especially from what the theory of 4GW has propounded about the change in warfare.

Although war is a political and sometimes legal relationship between belligerents, it is also a social institution, and therefore revolutionary changes in warfare can be triggered by a transformation of warfare whose consequences could be offset by extra-military developments (Grey 2006: 4) and therefore there are differences between Military Revolutions (MR) and Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA's). To quote 'whereas the latter (RMA's) are chosen happenings, pursued purposefully by states to produce new ways of destroying their opponents, the former (MRs) bring systemic changes in politics and society' (Knox and Murray 2001: 7–12). The rise of non-state actors fighting states through terrorism and insurgencies should be seen as a part of MR's and therefore systemic in nature. What the non-state actors propose to establish is an egalitarian system which would be different from the present exploitative system based on caste and class. Read in this context, al-Suri's 'Call for a Global Islamic Resistance' that intends to bring-in systemic changes within the organisation and functioning of al Qaeda, which in turn will lead to systemic changes in the way warfare has till now being waged. Therefore there is a need to understand how 4GW is different and how its principles are different from the principles henceforth governing conventional warfare. The non-state actors have been far ahead of the state actors in understanding this systemic change in warfare affecting politics and society, and have accordingly prepared themselves and have shown better results; the security forces needs to take hint from them and follow the suit. One of the ways of understanding this systemic change could be to analyse the tenets of 4GW and then find out what needs to be done to neutralise the effects of these principles governing the 4GW in which terrorists seems to be getting mastery.

## **Basic Tenets of Fourth Generation Warfare and their Adherence by the Non-state Actors**

There seems to be a consensus among the security analysts that the warfare has changed. Even if one may not agree with what the theorists of 4GW are trying to postulate<sup>2</sup> one cannot but agree to the changes in the features governing warfare, suggested by them. The theorists of 4GW argue that unlike conventional warfare, 4GW has certain features which make them unique and different from conventional warfare. These features are (drawn from what its theorists have suggested about change in warfare):

### *Conventional War between States being Replaced by War between State and Non-state Actors*

One of the ardent arguments of the theory of 4GW happens to be its advocacy concerning the emergence of non-state actors in the battlefield replacing states as an instrument of warfare in the traditional sense

of the term. Lind (2004: 1) categorically states that ‘Fourth Generation War is the greatest change since the Peace of Westphalia,<sup>3</sup> because it marks the end of the state’s monopoly over war’. The idea of conventional warfare replacing asymmetrical conflict or non-conventional threats to states sovereignty would have seemed anathema a few decades ago.<sup>4</sup> It was Creveld (1991) who for the first time argued that inter-state war was a thing of the past and insurgencies and similar other forms of asymmetrical warfare would dominate the future warfare. Kaplan (1994) supported Creveld’s assertion by arguing that state failure and criminal instability rather than inter-state war posed the principal security risks of the future.<sup>5</sup> A paper presented at the American Political Science Association on ‘Civil war since 1945: Some facts and a theory’ stated that ‘most civil wars in this period have been fought as guerrilla conflicts in which state counter-insurgent forces hunt for small, lightly armed rebel units operating in rural areas, often in rough terrain and this pattern has been visible in Vietnam, Guatemala, Al Salvador, Colombia, Algeria, Philippines, Southeast Turkey, Peru, Northeast India, Burma, Thailand, Kashmir, Nepal, Indonesia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Sudan and many other places’.<sup>6</sup> If one adds to this list the threat of terrorism faced by states, it would not take long to make the point that warfare has really moved on from the conventional to the non-conventional one. For India the problem seems to be more acute as in a compilation of countries most afflicted by terrorism, India has been ranked third in the list of twenty countries.<sup>7</sup> Besides at least 231 of the country’s 608 districts are currently afflicted by insurgency at differing intensities.<sup>8</sup> Therefore the change in warfare is quite visible in the world in general and in India in particular, moving discernibly from the conventional warfare to the non-conventional, asymmetrical threats. Yet neither in India nor in the United States, leading the war on terrorism, there has been an attempt to organise the forces fighting 4GW in accordance with the change in principles governing these warfare, that is to equip the forces to fight like a guerrilla or a terrorist. Conventional forces have been trained to fight conventional warfare and cannot be expected to win wars in which they have no expertise and that is one of the reason why involvement of army to fight naxalism or terrorism has shown such dismal results. As far as Indian army is concerned it has shown its unwillingness in being engaged in asymmetrical conflicts, particularly naxalism. The view in the armed forces seems to be that they can at the most be utilised for imparting training to the anti-naxalite or anti-terrorism forces but not for direct combat operations against the terrorists or the naxalites as that is not their primary duty for which they have been raised. Beside there is acute shortage of officers in the armed forces and the force believes that it should not be overburdened to defend internal security of the states. The logic seems rational as there is a possibility of raising special units for internal security purposes. There is a need for the state to raise units which are specifically trained and prepared to fight asymmetrical warfare with skills of operating in rough and hilly terrains on its own with minimum logistics available and without any command from above. The terrorists and insurgents have adopted such strategies and we need to change our strategy accordingly.

### *The Traditional Distinction between War and Politics gets Blurred*

No matter how one interprets Huntington’s (1996) central thesis that ‘in the post-Cold War world, the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political or economic. They are cultural’ none can deny the fact that cultural differences have been more vogue in the present decade; Croats,

Muslims and Serbs in Bosnia, Muslims and Hindus in Kashmir, Russians and Armenians in Chechen and Azerbaijan, Jews and Muslims over Palestine, Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka and the conflict between China and its various non-Chinese neighbours and so on. Not going into the details of the argument that groups from different cultural background have fought with each other throughout history, one can argue that the present terrorists and insurgents owe their loyalty more to their cultures than to the nation-states.<sup>9</sup> The shift in allegiance of the terrorists and insurgents groups from nation-states to cultures and civilisations has been remarkable. Al Qaeda's way of working is representative of this transition. With the aid of the Quran and Hadith and drawing lessons from the past and the present, al Qaeda lures and fasten the youth to its fold (Gunaratna 2003: 74). Al-Suri's (1990) call to every Muslim, irrespective of their location to participate in jihad has not remained a mere call any more. The growing participation of terrorists raised in West in global salafist-jihad is indication of the diminishing role of state's loyalty in motivating individual to refrain from taking resource to terrorism. India might refrain from using the term 'Islamic Terrorism' but it can't deny the involvement of Islamic terrorist groups in the various terrorist attacks which it has faced over the years. The demand by right wing campaigners of Switzerland for removal of minarets from all mosques, the call by French President Nicholas Sarkozy for a ban on wearing burqas in public, the demolition of mosque in Ayodhya by right wing party in India are indication of strengthening of ties between individual and its religious and ethnic identity. One does not find any efforts on part of the security forces to dismantle this allegiance of the terrorists and insurgents to cultures and civilisation and divert them to owe their allegiance to the nations to which they belong. How this could be done, of course, is a matter of further research but one does not even find a discourse along this line of thought in the counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism arena.

### *The War is Fought through Manoeuvre with Less Reliability on Logistical Support*

Fourth Generation Warfare is based on manoeuvre and its essence could best be summed up in Otto Von Bismarck's quote that 'We live in a wondrous time in which the strong is weak because of his moral scruples and the weak grows strong because of his audacity' and nowhere this dichotomy is more visible than in the functioning of any terrorist outfit. Any government is representative of the will of the people and repository of its security and when the terrorists or insurgents attack any section of the population it erodes the state's status of being the protector of its citizens. The population which happens to be the assets of any state becomes the most vulnerable element in any counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism policy or strategy, shifting the centre of gravity from the 'battlefield' to the entire 'societal space'. The centre of gravity which forms the heart of any conventional warfare is diffused to an extent that the traditional notion of battlefield becomes vague. In India one particular debate concerning the growth of naxalism happens to be the failure of the states in delivering to the tribals their due rights, their rights to land and natural resources. The system no doubt has failed in delivering justice to the tribals, however one forgets to look into the fact that guerrillas cannot operate in urban areas where they could easily be detected. So they go deep into the forest where there is no *thana*, no infrastructure to communicate and connect to the people, in other words they take recourse to an area where the government authority is the weakest. This is what the rule of asymmetry teaches to its adherents, that is, strike at a point which is weakest in your enemy, and terrorist and naxalites are doing exactly the same. They are getting hold of

areas where there seems to be no semblance of government authority either because it has no roads to communicate to, no courts to dispense justice to, no schools, hospitals and so on. Al Qaeda's choosing of World Trade Centre to attack the US is a case in point. The World Trade Centre was representative of America's strength and the tumbling down of the building into rubble was symbolic of the destruction of the US strength for the terrorists who could have never otherwise matched US conventional superiority. September 11 will therefore go down in history as the moment when the world ceased to think of warfare exclusively as conventional clashes of massive, sophisticated weapons on the battlefield and reverted to seeing war in rawest, truest and oldest form, characterised by small groups of warriors striking by surprise or at night against the actual or psychological rear of the enemy (Alexander 2002: 181–82). The same explanation could be extended for Parliament attack or the Mumbai attack in India by the terrorists. The terrorists and insurgents were fast to learn the tactics of decentralisation, non-linearity, dispersal of command and tactics of manoeuvre, which the security forces fighting terrorism and insurgency have till not adopted or even given a serious thought of adopting it.

### *Shift in Focus from the Enemy's Front to His Rear*

The unique features of 4GW like non-state actors use of violence to wage war leading to conflicts between states and cultures deriving the fodder from division along ethnic and religious lines has also led to a shift in the way conventional wars have so far been fought. The non-state actors lacking the expertise needed to wage conventional warfare adopts new techniques of warfare, the aim of which is not to defeat the enemy, which the non-state actors cannot do anyway, but to morally defeat the enemy or the state actors. The aim now is not to attack the enemy from the front but from the rear, trying to get a grip over the mental consciousness of the population. Thus the mayhem perpetrated by the terrorists or the insurgent's attack are symbolic of the moral violence perpetrated on the larger mass per say. The aim of violence is to violate the basic rights of the society, that is, violation of security; violation of the primary duty of the state to provide security to its citizens. The actual use of force (say bombing an embassy or a building) is not proportional to the damage done (that is violation of the rights) to the psyche of the populace. The non-state actors thus seem to use the violence in a comprehensive way, that is, while their violence is aimed at the state, the violation accruing through it is aimed at the society. The society in turn blames the state for not being able to protect their lives and sometimes even support the non-state actors either in anticipation of security from them or agreeing that they are fighting to secure their rights which the state has violated.

Thus the forces dealing with 4GW need to understand this basic strategy of the non-state actors, that is, their comprehensive use of the concept of violence. It is in this context that Watson (1976) has argued that in reality there are four basic strategies of the terrorists (one could apply the same analogy to insurgency too), which could be placed under two sub-heads: visible and invisible. Visible part consists of the violence, which catches our attention and the issues for which the terrorists or insurgents claim to have perpetrated the violence. The invisible part consists of the propaganda and organising activities, which exploit the selected issues and systematically build up to the violence. Each strategy bears a cyclical relationship, setting up an action–reaction sequence, the cycle having self-refuelling features. Jenkins (1975)



makes a similar analysis when he says that there is a ‘theory of terrorism’, or ‘theory of insurgency’ which often works and so unless we try to think like terrorists or insurgents, we are liable to miss the point. Thus what is important in counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism is that the security forces should be aware of this theory of terrorism and insurgency which works from behind the scene. The security forces should aim to destroy the invisible part of asymmetric warfare and the visible part will itself sublime.

One should not be led to believe here that asymmetrical warfare is unique to 4GW. However asymmetry acquires new dimension in 4GW in the sense that here one of the party happens to be a non-state actor whose relative strength is no match compared to the resources and power of the state. Szafranski has very well argued that:

the terrorist operations are activities undertaken by the few, the weak, to offset the strengths and capitalize on the vulnerabilities of the strong. They are “asymmetric operations” in that they aim to offset the attacker’s weakness by striking at a centre of mass that intends to shock—often because groups of innocent non-combatants are attacked—and disorient and unbalance the strong adversary. Therefore what is needed is to learn to fight an adversary who attacks from behind in a terrain which is completely alien to the security forces. (Szafranski 2002: 4)

### *The Non-state Actors Organise Themselves into Small-independent-cell like Structures which Function in a Decentralised Way*

The non-conventional threats posed by terrorists acquiring biological or nuclear weapons of mass destruction have rendered the traditional concept of battlefield vogue. Fighting 4GW requires infiltrating into the camps of the terrorists and the insurgents for which state can rely on the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA)<sup>10</sup> for intelligence gathering and precision targeting but not on the use of conventional forces working on the principles of linearity and hierarchy. One cannot shy away from Alexander’s (2002: 232) observation that ‘with the subsequent completion of the satellite-directed Global Positioning System or GPS, the vulnerability of troops on the battlefield has become even greater because bombs and missiles can be sent with almost pinpoint accuracy to practically any spot on earth, which means that the huge weapons and massive collisions of millions of men in battle, which characterised the two World Wars 1914–19 and 1939–45, have now passed away’. It was perhaps this realisation which made the theorist of 4GW like Lind (2004) believe that in Fourth Generation Warfare, the non-state actors would practice non-linearity, possibly to the point of having no definite battlefields or fronts with decreasing dependence on centralised logistics. In contrast to the unity of command practiced in traditional warfare, the insurgents and terrorists function on the basis of dispersal of command. There exist different charismatic leaders in different regions trying to enlist the support of the disgruntled masses in their area of operation. Unity of command is advantageous in warfare because if one breaks a single link in the command the entire structure comes toppling down whereas in dispersal of command not only the task of tracing the enemy gets difficult it even makes traditional warfare difficult to launch as there is no centre of gravity to be hit at. What is needed therefore is a shift in focus from engaging the enemy overtly to



covert attack on him through different asymmetric tactics. Almost a similar line of thought has been expressed by Mazarr (2008: 34) where he argues that ‘The implications for US defence policy were obvious enough: dump the dinosaur systems, doctrines, and force structures optimized for big wars and develop new ones to cope with the asymmetric conflicts that the United States would be fighting in the future’. There is a growing realisation of this among the think tanks and it is the turn of the states to take hints from the findings of the think tanks to direct their policies in the similar direction. India particularly has a lesson to learn from these findings in reorganising its force structures in the face of the growing threat from naxalism and terrorism which it seems to ignore. The Home Minister P. Chidambaram (Express India 2009) recently came out with a plan to use drone aircraft (unmanned aircrafts) to detect Maoists and their centres in the naxal-affected areas which particularly ignores the limitations faced by the US in Afghanistan while depending on these technologies and India must learn lessons and the sooner it does the better it will be for the masses who are dying in day-to-day combat between the Government of India and the Maoists.

### *They would Use Freedom’s Openness against Itself*

Fourth Generation Warfare survives on propaganda. When Wilkinson (2003) highlights the facts as to why democracies are ill-equipped to fight terrorism, he was hinting at this element of democracy, that is, its freedom and openness which puts severe constraints on its counter-terrorist<sup>11</sup> or counter-insurgent policies. The terrorists are aware of this fact. Therefore Fourth Generation warriors use the tactics of psychological operations in the form of media and intervention information. Psychological operations use propaganda to alter domestic and world opinion, as well as degrade the enemy population support of its own government causing that government to implode (Davis 2006).<sup>12</sup> The terrorists weave their ploy slowly through international systems of education, commerce and travel, accessing the fabric of democratic societies and exploiting our freedom of movement, information systems, protection of civil rights and the general laxness in our public security, all fostered through the instrument of globalisation into a web-like pattern (Meigs 2003).<sup>13</sup> Lind gives similar analysis concerning the effects of society’s freedom on terrorists and insurgents when he argues that:

they (terrorists) can move freely within our (American) society while actively working to subvert it... If we treat them within our laws, they gain many protections; if we simply shoot them down, television news can make them appear to be victims... If we are forced to set aside our own system of legal protections to deal with terrorists, the terrorists win another sort of victory. (Lind et al. 1989: 22–25)

It is this anathema between freedom of openness and the legislation required to curb terrorism and insurgency which is manipulated by the perpetrators of the 4GW. The amount of footage given to the Maoists of Andhra Pradesh during the 2004 dialogue with the Maoists is a case in point. The government needs to educate the masses about this weakness of the democratic system and turn it into strength. The forces need to wage an information war with the insurgents keeping the focus on the public opinion which provide the fodder for the terrorists and insurgent’s survival.

### ***The Fourth Generation Warfare Force would not Need a Lot of Money to Wage War***

One of the reasons for sporadic spread of 4GW has been the low cost involved in waging such wars. Consider the cost involved in incurring a suicide attack and it makes a mockery of the huge defence allocations made by the powerful states like the US on building their conventional might. Even the nuclear deterrence being not effective in the face of asymmetric warfare raises a debate regarding huge defence allocations for nuclear build up particularly by developing countries like India and Pakistan whose large territory has been witness to one of the most sinister design of terrorists and insurgents. The estimated cost borne by the US on its nuclear weapons and nuclear related programmes in 1998 was estimated to be US\$ 35,100,000,000 in 1998.<sup>14</sup> One can well imagine the money spent now by the United States on nuclear programmes. It has been estimated that India spends ten per cent of its GDP on nuclear defence despite the fact that it is said that its deterrence can only work against Pakistan (although till now Pakistan has not been deterred by its nuclear status) and not against China or other nuclear powers. Insurgent or terrorist groups driven by ideology depend on security and manoeuvre to economise force. Their lack of conventional might is subdued by their mastery over manoeuvre and surprise in operational arts. It has been well argued, therefore, by an American strategic analyst that 'Other countries can challenge the United States effectively by fighting indirectly, moving away from our military strength, and avoiding large concentrations of weapons and men that we can locate and destroy' (Alexander 1995: 105) and the same holds true for any other country, including India faced with terrorism or insurgency.

### **Implementation of the Tenets of Fourth Generation Warfare by al Qaeda**

If one analyses the features of warfare as inferred from the theory of 4GW, one would find that these features form the core of fighting by the non-state actors and are particularly representative of al Qaeda's way of functioning and structuring. Was it a mere coincidence that al Suri's 'Call for a Global Islamic Resistance' was made public in the year 1990; just one year after Lind wrote the seminal article in *Marine Corps Gazette* outlining the features of 4GW. It was also the period when the allied forces led by the United States were having an upper hand over al Qaeda as they were able to force Bin Laden and its remaining associates to take refuge in Pakistan. This was a period marked by a turmoil regarding the future of al Qaeda and the course of action it should take to attain its objectives. While the world was waging its war on terrorism hoping that they could wipe the evil face of terrorism from the face of earth through their superior technology, the terrorists were all through preparing to find a way as to how best they could neutralise the technical superiority of the adversary they faced.

Going by the logic of warfare, each change in warfare should be accompanied by the changes in the mode of fighting by the conventional forces. However as far as fighting the non-state actors are concerned, one finds that the conventional forces of the state have not learnt from the principles governing the 4GW. The non-state actors in this respect have shown far greater innovativeness and adaptability as far as learning lessons from the changes in warfare is concerned. Anyone who tries to study al Qaeda, particularly its organisational set-up, is forced to conclude that its organisation<sup>15</sup> is representative of the principles of 4GW. Al-Qaeda has a worldwide compartmentalised cells with supports spanning around the world.

In fact decentralisation of warfare happens to be one of the basic premises of the proponents of the 4GW theory. Decentralisation of the terrorists groups does not seem to be an accidental phenomenon but a well thought-out programme carried out by the terrorist to achieve maximum result in the type of warfare they are indulging in. Cruickshank and Ali (2007: 1) has shown how Abu Musab al Suri (real name Mustafa Setmariam Nasar), now in the US custody, was the principle architect of al Qaeda's post-9/11 structure and strategy. It was his vision which transformed al Qaeda from a vulnerable hierarchical organisation into a resilient decentralised movement, the formula al Qaeda adopted after the collapse of the Taliban. To quote Cruickshank and Ali (2006: 2), 'The morphing of al Qaeda from an organization with its own Afghanistan-based bureaucracy, hierarchies, and modus operandi into an ideological umbrella for more loosely tied jihadists around the world, is by now a familiar story'.

It is no coincidence that 'The Global Islamic Resistance Call' by Abu Musab al Suri as interpreted by Lia (2008) and Black (2006) talks about incorporating those principles in warfare which Lind has so vociferously tried to associate the 4GW with. In Lind's model the individuals operate with only a semblance of command and control apparatus. In a similar vein, Suri's emphasis is on decentralisation, limiting or eradicating the organisational aspect altogether. Al Suri suggests that unlike in a military or traditional terrorist group which maintains a modicum of organisational tier structure, in his system this will be completely removed and instead there will be an ideological leadership, not directly linked to individual operatives. What he is suggesting is the creation of a completely decentralised cell-like structure consisting of individuals and groups working on the pattern of decentralisation of command and control system. It has been pointed out in the strategic think tanks that Nasar's call for 'nizam' la tanzim'<sup>16</sup> are quite in contrast to the Egyptian model of largely regionally focussed elite Jihadi groups to a new deterritorialised system of fighting suited to the complexities of the global battlefield and cognizant of the trials of the ummah, 'jihad of individualised or cellular terrorism'.<sup>17</sup>

The structural organisation as well as the functioning of al Qaeda reflects the tenets of 4GW. In the words of Williams, 'diffused organizational structure has additional benefits for a group perpetrating criminal activities. Because leaders and key members are not publicly elected and are not public figures in the Western sense, they maintain a certain level of plausible deniability with relation to the actions of the larger organization. Even the most prominent personalities of the organization may only be fronts for the real behind-the-scenes power brokers. To complicate matters further, the true identity of even publicly recognized individuals may be questionable' (Williams 2005, 4).<sup>18</sup> All key members are indoctrinated so that should central authorities be destroyed, a new power centre can be created from residual, globally dispersed resources. Even Sanders has given a similar analysis of the functioning of al Qaeda wherein he argues that:

our inability to see and understand the interconnected non-linear nature of the world made us vulnerable to the malevolent intentions of those who could. The enemy we face is a loose coalition of semi-independent terrorist cells, each with a well-defined mission and a high degree of adaptability and flexibility in carrying out that mission. Al Qaeda does not rely on immediate direction from a central authority yet still maintains effective coordination—a model similar to the one used by the crime syndicates—and hence has been far less susceptible to intrusion or destruction. (Sanders 2002)

To quote one of the strategic think tank blog 'No jihadi strategist has ever articulated this autonomous, self-contained and ideas-driven system of fighting so clearly; Abu Ubayd al-Qurayshi's adaptation of

William S. Lind's 4GW theory might come the closest (even if Nasar's work could be seen as the fulfilment of al-Qurayshi). In some ways, Nasar's theories also reflect "commander's intent", a military concept central to 4GW that guides special operations forces working for long periods in the adversary's territory, far-removed from their command structures and under deep cover (although Nasar, of course, sees formal command structures as entirely antithetical to effective warfare and argues for an "everyman's" jihad, not that of elite fighting forces).<sup>19</sup> Al Qaeda has thus adapted its methods to accomplish its goals. This is in direct contrast to the defence and intelligence gathering mechanism used by the state forces. This is what the theorists of 4GW has been suggesting when they talk about the 'shift in focus from the enemy's front to his rear' as one of the tenets of the 4GW (Lind et al. 1989, Hammes 1994 and Crevelde 1991).

If one takes one tenet of 4GW, that is decentralisation and try to trace it in the operative strategies of al Qaeda, one would be surprised to note how much thought the concept has been given by the terrorists. One look into one of the passages in Abu Musab al Suri's book reveals this fact. To quote Lia, who has translated chapter eight of his book,

Al-Suri's slogan is: *nizam, la tanzim*, 'System, not organisation'. In other words, there should be 'an operative system' or template, available anywhere for anybody, wishing to participate in the global jihad either on his own or with a small group of trusted associates, and there should not exist any 'organisation for operations'. Hence, the global jihadist movement should discourage any direct organisational bonds between the leadership and the operative units. Leadership should only be exercised through 'general guidance' and the operative leaders should exist only at the level of small cells. The glue in this highly decentralised movement is nothing else than 'a common aim, a common doctrinal program and a comprehensive (self-) educational program'.

The same goal of decentralisation is applied to financing and training. All cells should be self-sustained financially, with the possible exception of start-up money from jihadist activists termed 'cell builders'. The latter category include skilled jihadists whose primary task is to create new independent cells, without connecting them to any organisational structure. The 'cell builder' is an Achilles heel in the system, and various precautions are taken to minimize the risk associated with his role. He is supposed to disappear from the scene before any operative activity commences, either by going to another country, going completely underground, or participating in a martyrdom operation. (Lia 2008: 17)

The content of the paragraph leaves no doubt in the minds of the reader that terrorists like al Suri have prepared well to transform al Qaeda into a truly global organisation, an organisation which will have its branches in every country and yet these branches will not be directly linked to each other through any command and control structuring. These branches will function independently of each other drawing only ideological inspirations from the head of the organisation and committing acts of terror in the name of the parent organisation to further its overall objective. One might say that the system which al Suri is trying to establish cannot become a reality as there are many hurdles in the path of its realisation but can anyone give the assurance that it will never be realised. Even if what al Suri is advocating is partially realised it will spell doom for the world. The threat is real and pertinent and one cannot sit to see whether the methodology propagated by al Suri has the potential to create a global jihad or not. The time now is to act and prepare ourselves to fight such thoughts before they could materialise and nip them in their buds. How this could be done has not been thought and it is time that the security agencies of each country put their effort to understand this new threat and carve out ways and means of thwarting them.

India particularly needs to make its security agencies aware of such preparedness being undertaken by the terrorist organisations and prepare itself as to how best deal with them. One doesn't shy away from the fact that it is easier said than done but it is also true that until and unless one has the true assessment of its enemy it can never put its best to fight it.

## What the Indian Government Needs to Do

The terrorists have been learning fast to create a global jihad and reduce the entire world into a battlefield. Terrorists like al Suri are preparing the ground for its realisation and their spread of ideas which aims to transform the way warfare till now has been waged by the non-state actors has created new security threats for the states. There is an urgent need to modify our forces and also to create new units which are specifically trained to fight asymmetric warfare through decentralisation, manoeuvre without proper command and control structure and in difficult and alien terrains. The Indian government needs to rethink its counter-insurgency strategy. The mere modernisation of police forces and equipping them with modern state of the arm will not do the trick. The security forces dealing with terrorism and insurgency needs to be educated about the tenets of warfare first so that they will have a clear idea of the intentions and methodologies of the terrorists and the insurgents. The training imparted to the counter-terrorist and counter-insurgent forces should be in tune with the realities of the new warfare, its changed principles and methodologies. The armed forces also need to reorient their training programmes keeping in mind the features governing the asymmetric warfare. It is being said that necessity is the mother of all inventions; the terrorists and insurgents have realised it and now it is the turn of the state forces to learn this.

### Notes

1. Al-Suri is one of the most important contrarians and theorist-practitioners in the history of al Qaeda. Ackerman (2008) has pointed out that 'If bin Laden's lieutenant, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is analogous to V.I. Lenin, Al-Suri is the jihadist Leon Trotsky: eager to pick a doctrinal fight and inject a reformist current into Al Qaeda's operations'.
2. There is particularly disagreement among the scholars concerning the division of warfare into four generations and ascribing to the fourth generation the terminology of 'Fourth Generation Warfare' Thompson (2009), Stewart (2004), Lind et al. (1989) and Hammes (2004).
3. The Peace of Westphalia initiated a new order in central Europe based on the concept of nation's sovereignty ending the thirty years war in the Holy Roman Empire and the eighty years war between Spain and the republic of the Seven United Netherlands. The Treaty promulgated an order in which only the state or its agencies had the power to wage war.
4. All warfare is asymmetrical in the sense that the relative strength of the warring parties vary. What is unique to 4GW is that in it the conflict is between the state whose power is visible and the non-state actors whose power are vague and ambiguous.
5. Similar views have been recently expressed by authors like Hammes (2004 and 2006) and Boot (2003).
6. The paper was prepared by James D. Fearon (2005), of the department of Political Science, Stanford University.
7. The data has been collected from [http://www.travelersdigest.com/terrorism\\_host\\_spots.htm](http://www.travelersdigest.com/terrorism_host_spots.htm).
8. The figures have been taken from the site <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/inide/index.htm>.
9. Even Walt (1997 and 2009) accuses Huntington for not explaining the decline in loyalty towards states in comparison to ones civilisation among the warring groups.

10. Jablonsky (1994) has discussed in detail the doctrinal changes required under the aegis of the changed warfare scenario in view of the Revolution in Military Affairs.
11. Raman (2006) makes an interesting distinction between counter-terrorism strategy and counter-terrorist strategy. The former treats terrorism as a phenomenon with political, economic, social, religious and security aspects and tries to find a holistic answer to the problem instead of focusing exclusively on the security approach. The latter treats terrorism exclusively as a threat to national security to be eliminated firmly through the neutralisation of the terrorist organisations and their leaders.
12. The tenets and tactics of 4GW have been further discussed critically through case studies by Davis (2006: 2–6).
13. Meigs (2003) further argues that in asymmetric warfare the asymmetry functions to the advantage of the terrorists, be it in the realm of technological revolution or information break through.
14. The data has been taken from the source <http://www.brookings.edu/projects/archive/nucweapons/50.aspx>
15. For details concerning the organisation and ideology of al Qaeda refer to Riedel (2008), Gunaratna (2003) and Post (2007).
16. The *tanzims*, according to al-Suri, are outmoded because they can be so easily countered by attacking those states that provide sanctuary or by taking advantage of the weakness inherent in hierarchical organisations.
17. This has been posted in the counter-terrorism blog via the site file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/vinita/Desktop/abu%20musab/The-call-for-a-global-Islamic-resistance.htm.
18. The idea is an extension of what Williams in his article ‘Matrix Warfare: The New face of Competition and Conflict in the 21st Century’ has argued about asymmetric warfare in the context of al Qaeda wherein he says that to defeat al Qaeda one needs to understand its organisational structure and functioning based on complete decentralisation and non-linearity.
19. Ibid.

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