STRATEGIC DECAPITATION AND COUNTERINSURGENCY

Presentation by Dr. Steven Metz

During the U.S. Army War College National Security Seminar

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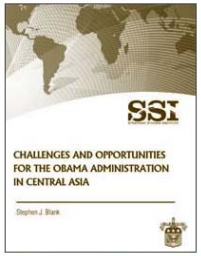

President Obama has outlined a comprehensive strategy for the war in Afghanistan which is now the central front of our campaign against Islamic terrorism. The strategy strongly connects our prosecution of that war to our policy in Pakistan and internal developments there as a necessary condition of victory. But the strategy has also provided for a new logistics road through Central Asia. The author argues that a winning strategy in Afghanistan depends as well upon the systematic leveraging of the opportunity provided by that road and a new coordinated nonmilitary approach to Central Asia. That approach would rely heavily on improved coordination at home and the more effective leveraging of our superior economic power in Central Asia to help stabilize the region so that it provides a secure rear to Afghanistan. In this fashion we would help

Upcoming Events

June 4-5, 2009
Critical Cyber Infrastructure Protection: Policy and Strategy
New York, New York, United States

June 10-12, 2009
At Home in the Americas: Canada, the United States, and Hemispheric Security
Kingston, Ontario, Canada

June 24, 2009
For the President's Agenda—National Security Reform for a Post-911 World
Washington, DC, United States

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Of Current Interest

Quick access to SSI analysis about The Changing Nature of War.

Renowned nuclear historian Sir Lawrence Freedman reviews *Nuclear Heuristics* in *Foreign Affairs*

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Selected Recent Publications

- State and Nonstate Associated Gangs
- Cultural Dimensions of Strategy and Policy
- Mexico's Narco-Insurgency and U.S. Counterdrug Policy
- Beyond the Strait: PLA Missions other than Taiwan
- Towards a U.S. Army Officer Corps Strategy for Success: A Proposed Human Capital Model Focused upon Talent

American Involvement in Counterinsurgency

- U.S. never enthusiastic, but compelled
- 1960s: "death by 1,000 small cuts"
  - *Vietnam*
- 1980s: revived attention, El Salvador
  - *Small footprint, indirect role*
- 1990s: attention on peacekeeping
- 2000s: Iraq and Afghanistan
  - *Revived interest, new doctrine, training education*

Current Issues

- Should the Army should focus on counterinsurgency?
- How should the Army organize for counterinsurgency?
  - *Specialized units or "pentathletes"?*
- How can DoD sustain counterinsurgency efforts?
- How can the U.S. expand its non-military capabilities?

High Value Targeting

- High value targeting (HVT) holds appeal to the American public and political leaders
  - *Experts often contend that it doesn't work*
  - *Truth is somewhere in between*
- Need a framework focused on strategic effects
  - *Not operational and tactical requirements, legality, or morality*

Conceptual Framework

- HVT has **strategic effects**
  - *Erode the insurgency's effectiveness*
  - *Weaken the will of the insurgents*
  - *Deter support for the insurgents*
  - *Fragment or split the insurgency*
  - *Alter the insurgent strategy, organization, or hierarchy*
  - *Strengthen the morale of and support for the government*
  - *Increase support for the insurgents*
- Strategy must maximize desired effects and minimize undesired one

Cases

- Chechnya
  - *Russians made great use of HVT: Shamil Basayev, "Khattab"*
  - *Provided opportunity because of importance of charisma to the insurgency*
- Peru
  - *Shining Path: Maoist-Marxist insurgency led by Abimael Guzman*
  - *Guzman captured in 1992, insurgency eroded*
  - *It was , "hydrocephalic," similar to a religious cult*
- Palestine
  - *Extensive HVT program*
  - *Eroded technical proficiency, little effect on leadership*
- Iraq

Conclusions

- Accurate strategic assessment of HVT is difficult
  - *Multiple effects, must gauge psychological reactions, probabilities rather than causal relationships*
- Must first identify desired outcomes
- HVT may help make an insurgency manageable; it may hinder “taming” it or addressing structural causes
  - *We can't kill them all*

Conclusions

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- HVT may be necessary if sanctuary is important to insurgents
- HVT more effective against early stage insurgents or those with limited regenerative capability
  - *Governments unlikely to use HVT when it would be most effective*
- HVT is not a panacea
  - *May, under certain circumstances, be part of a* ***comprehensive population-centric counterinsurgency strategy***
  - *If underlying causes are not addressed, violence will return*

The Paradoxical Logic of Strategy

- What appears best may not be
- What works today may not tomorrow

Contact Information:

Dr. Steven Metz
Strategic Studies Institute
122 Forbes Avenue
Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5244

steven.metz@us.army.mil
voice: 717 245-3822
fax: 717 245-3820
wireless: 717 448-6116

http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil