

(As presented to National War College Alumni, Ft. McNair, 25 October 2007)

GETTING PAST IRAQ

Theme – The Best Way To Win Wars Is To Make Them Unnecessary

Introduction – Pheasant Story

A Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals person was seated next to me on the plane as I traveled to South Dakota to hunt pheasants. I was dressed in hunting garb with an Army of One Pin attached to my hunting coat. She gave me a curious sidelong glance and finally asked pointedly “Do you eat everything you kill?”

I Responded: “Yes, except for people.”

She asked to be re-seated and I went back to my Martini.

Moral: Soldiers and Marines kill people and break things in order to defend our country WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS. Today, I want to talk primarily about the “all else” aspect, and how best to improve it.

Disclaimer - Must first express my personal bias and identify Vietnam as the template from which I draw my views and project forward to solutions in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. My Vietnam experience, plus numerous discussions with the 8, now 7, members of my extended family who have served as Army officers in Iraq and Afghanistan in positions ranging from Assistant Division Commander and Division Chief of Staff and Division Engineer, to a knock on the door MI intelligence collector. Then you can apply your personal credibility percentage to what I am about to say in both problem identification and solution as to how to configure for the future fight against those who would do our vital interests harm. I will not call the conflict "GWOT" nor its participants Islamic Fascists or any other acronym of the moment. Suffice it to call them collectively Insurgents and Counterinsurgents, inclusive of state and non-state participants, regardless of wherever they may be, and whatever is their motivation for conflict.

My Conclusion - There are situations in the world the US cannot resolve militarily. Vietnam was one of them. Iraq is another. Neither war was ours to win, and both were theirs to lose. We always have been very poor at making distinctions between military and political victories and losses, and prone to support the losing side in Civil Wars – except for our own.

We simply need a better formulation than “bomb now, build later.” Clear, hold and build is a good start. Secretary Gates in his speech to the AUSA last month encouraged innovative approaches to implementation. What follows could be one of them and lifts considerably from writings as far back as Vietnam, and as current as the words of LTG Chiarelli, Nagl, Killebrew, Daly and that team of experts helping Petraeus salvage Iraq with a possibly too late, but nonetheless correct, focus on people as the target of joint Iraqi/US efforts both military and civil. We understand the model. But for the future, we need a different implementing organization than the splendid kinetic force that took

down the country we must now help rebuild. In Vietnam, we went from advisors to a kinetic conventional force to resolve the conflict. It did not work. In Iraq, we are proceeding from a kinetic conventional force to an advisory force and the outcome is still in doubt. Ironically, the same social force that defeated our efforts in Vietnam because of our inability to conquer it, now defeats our efforts in Iraq because of our inability to create it -- a sense of nationalism among the locals.

My Vietnam - It was indeed a political war incapable of military resolution. No amount of bombs dropped on the North could create a viable government in the South. US civilian and military leadership schooled in WWII saw an umbilical cord through which communism flowed from Moscow to Beijing to Hanoi then on to the southern reaches of Vietnam all the way to Ca Mau. This was a political ideology, reinforced by the fear that the dominoes would surely fall in Asia if we did not respond militarily to prop them up. All my experience as an Advisor proved the contrary. The little old ladies with 30 years longevity who pressed their noses together when we approached in mistaken conclusion that we were French proconsuls recently repudiated and thrown out of country, belied the myth. As they attempted curiously to pluck the body hair from our arms since they had none, it was like being in a prehistoric world. That these pleasant peasants were indeed imbued with communist ideology bordered on the ridiculous. Security, food and education for their children remained their basic goals. Yet we struggled on and lost thousands of dedicated Soldiers of all stripes and nationalities in the process. Then we finally realized our strategic mistake and recognized Vietnam as a single geographic and cultural entity, an entity which I understand is now duly represented on the UN Security Council.

We lost the war wrong! We should have withdrawn in the early '60's when it was clear that the advisory effort had failed as had the Saigon Government it attempted to create. We promptly closeted the hard earned lessons of Pacification and took apart the microcosm country teams in Province and District after withdrawing, considered them as one time anomalies, and returned to defending Western Europe and winning the Cold War. However, we did learn that the advisory effort in Vietnam functioned best when its command chain was separated from that of our conventional forces and when individuals were especially selected and trained in what would be required of them as Province and District Senior Advisors.

In the future, we, the United States, must be able to conduct both Counterinsurgency (COIN) and Conventional Operations given our current force structure and planned personnel increases. Then we need to get Congress to fund and mandate that the other agencies of US Government similarly get ready to perform their part of the interagency COIN task.

Iraq - Attempting to democratize a country and to create popular will for a central government controlling disparate groups is proving a long term task requiring more security than we can provide and possibly taking more time and treasure than Americans will concede to the effort – some estimate 10 years. I hope not. But this time, unlike in the aftermath of Vietnam, we need to capitalize on our hard earned experience if we are to avoid future such threats to our Nation's vital interests.

The Solution for the Future - We are fully engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan and the Army, Marine Corps and our Allies offer a temporary fix by doing those tasks better done and done better by the “soft power” Agencies of the US Government. Indeed, if we conclude that wars of the future will be waged by insurgents as in Iraq, using the weapons of asymmetric warfare, we need to select individuals from of our military forces and civilian agencies to deal with this threat as an “interagency effort.” Notably, all such undertakings must recognize the utmost need for reliance on the locals, and not merely become an American injection of our own views on what is best for the countries of concern.

Changes in Force Structure – The overarching requirement for the defeat of an insurgency is to separate the insurgents from the general population, whether by military operations or by police action through the power of arrest. Destroying the insurgents is truly the first step in what is now popularly known as the secure, hold and build process to nation building.

The US Navy and US Air Force and Space Command can fill out the joint response admirably, temporarily, as the first line of defense in dealing with future peer competitors. It is critical that we ultimately reconstitute a strategic reserve that contains both nuclear and conventional deterrent sufficient to discourage adventurism from those countries most likely to challenge us. Meanwhile, selected members of the Army and the Marine Corps should develop and hone their skills in COIN as their parent forces prepare for their conventional role in employing the new technologies now being spun out of the Future Combat Systems program.

COIN is the Antidote for Insurgency – As to future war's nature, Kinetic is checkers, COIN is chess. Iraq is already creating, as did Vietnam, individual Kasparovs and Kasparovesses that understand the task--even if its application is about 3 years late. We must be able to play both games as the situation demands and COIN must be an interagency effort to succeed. COIN is not only the province of generals and is in fact more likely the results of studied actions of Majors and Lieutenant Colonels and the Senior NCO's that support them. Individual selection is key.

The US Military should play a supporting role to local forces in regions where security is not a major issue or the national police are deemed capable of providing security to the civilian population through the power of arrest. Sure, elements of the Army (and Marine Corps) must be recruited (or drafted), funded, trained, promoted and prepared to do both Kinetics and COIN. But those Service elements and individuals therein selected for the head game that is COIN need Psyops, Civil Affairs, Language, Regional Immersion etc. Call it Foreign Area Specialist Training (FAST) or whatever. Giving the mission to one or the other Services or to Special Forces is not the answer. Nor is creating a COIN Division or a Civilian Service Corps. Start with volunteers and a solid plan for promotion and reward for participants. Run a selection and screening process for candidates within both military and civilian agencies--as in creating Delta---and be ruthless in culling out non-performers. LTG Pete Chiarelli made a significant contribution to the effort in his “Learning From Our Modern Wars” article in *Military*

Review. His focus on the need to add an interagency effort in broader US Government support to the long term requirements of stabilizing and rebuilding nations is precisely correct. As he states, “we must embrace the concept of nation building and we must maintain our ability to defeat conventional military threats as well.” His call for a top down review of roles and missions of all national power is a good place to start the task. Congress must be involved to provide the necessary funding to strengthen nonmilitary agencies. Think 1947.

Preparing for COIN requires substantial augmentation of MAAGS and Missions performing under the Ambassador to administer preventative measures for failed and failing states--not to forcibly democratize them but to devise politico military plans supportive of both their and our own interests in the region.

Again, it requires a different command structure to control the COIN effort. Organizationally it must begin with NSC over watch and cascade downward through a vastly empowered, funded and resourced State Department that only the Congress can mandate and make happen. It is essential to have a Presidential Assistant (Czar) at the top of the decision pyramid armed with full presidential authority to coordinate the interagency effort in Washington to assist those downrange. Microcosm country support teams should be tailored country -by- country for and implement a jointly arrived at host country support plan. The Ambassador, as the Presidents representative, should be held accountable for plan execution. If this smacks of colonialism, so be it. Let's do it right and in our national interest as well as that of the host country.

In Summary – Kinetic is checkers and COIN is indeed chess. We need a National Advisory Corps (NAC) of dual tracked midlevel grades, selected from all government agencies, trained to the truly preemptive task of helping failed and failing states and fielded based on priority of a given states’ ability to affect our vital national interests. The program should start by selecting some 200 major and junior Lieutenant Colonels, men and women, and their FSO equivalents capable of leading such teams. One size does not fit all. The teams themselves would not be a “cookie cuttered” and parachuted in country-by-country, but teams well grounded in the basics of specific country plans and armed with the skill sets that permit them to become the “mechanics of implementation.” These civil military teams should perform in-country underneath the supervision of the Ambassador as part of the country team and be capable of working with the locals at the lowest political division within any given country. I have no doubt the Army is fully able to put together their contribution by screening Special Forces, Rangers, Psyops and Civil Affairs organizations for their contribution to the effort. Advising the local military to win their own war against the insurgency and transferring security to police to perform with the power of arrest is a logical outcome. Finding those with required skill set in the other agencies such as State and USAID, reincarnating USIA and the like will be a more demanding effort.

So there you have it. As with all proposals, implementation will prove most difficult. At least Washington seems now to be engaged in the discussion having recognized that we truly do have to plan now for “getting past Iraq.”

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