

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL
RELEASED BY THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
NATIONAL SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
NATIONAL SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS
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CONCERNING THE POTENTIAL
REGIONAL AND GLOBAL CONSEQUENCES OF
U.S. MILITARY ACTION IN IRAN**

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Introduction

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for providing me this opportunity to speak to you today. Your effort to widen and deepen public discussion about the direction of important elements of our nation's defense policy is, in my estimation, long overdue. Americans deserve this sort of close scrutiny of the Executive Branch's view of national security. They also need the chance to engage each other and public officials in a discourse about crucial matters relating to war and peace.

I include myself among a number of professionals who have long advocated for greater openness in the national security process while at the same time urging fellow citizens to become more involved in issues of national defense. The evidence suggests, however, attempts in this regard have stirred little interest.

To illustrate the sorts of matters that need greater public examination, I have taken the liberty of attaching to this written statement a book chapter and an article I authored or co-authored a number of years ago. They speak in greater detail to issues of war, strategy, and defense planning.

Thucydides said, "The secret of happiness is freedom, and the secret of freedom is courage." I occasionally share a further personal thought with young officers: "The secret of courage is competence and the secret of competence is knowledge."

In the ongoing global war our nation's soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen have proven their courage repeatedly while daily displaying professional competence. Regrettably, many of our most senior civilian leaders offered only bravado as they took our nation into the current war while evidencing little competence in prosecuting that war. As a nation we cannot allow this to happen again; we have found the cost too great. We will likely pay an even higher price if we were to confront Iran in the same ill-considered manner.

In my experience, bravado is usually a failing of those who have never been close to a battlefield or undertaken a serious study of the profession of arms. A lack of competence stems from an unwillingness to learn from others or from experience. The product of these two flawed character traits is usually arrogance and a tendency to believe that simply asserting something is true makes it true. When such assertions are revealed for what they are, public confidence in our leaders erodes. Citizens simply decide not to listen to these leaders.

Despite this very negative outlook on how we arrived at the situation we find ourselves in today, I am encouraged by the actions of the new civilian and military leaders in the Department of Defense. And I take heart in the work of Congressional committees such as yours, which strive to understand the emerging international security environment and to develop appropriate approaches to very difficult problems.

A National Discourse

I was a young child during the Second World War, but I still have memories of my parents and other relatives engaging in serious conversations about the course of that war and the actions of our national leaders. Even as a six year old the gravity of radio news broadcasts was evident to me. As a teenager I followed reporting on the Korean War closely as did my family, friends, and classmates. We all understood how important this conflict was for America and the need to remain informed about the actions of our government. While a college student in the 1960s, I participated in long debates with professors and fellow students—in the classroom and across the campus—concerning the appropriate strategy needed to meet the Soviet threat. We were familiar with the details of U.S. containment policy and strategic approaches such as “flexible response” and “mutually assured destruction.” Our discussions were not uninformed. As a Marine who fought twice in Vietnam I was well aware of the ongoing public argument about nearly every aspect of that war. Few Americans were neutral in their feelings and many felt compelled to carry their views into the public

square. The populace seemed to know that “war is much too serious a matter to leave to the generals” or for that matter to senior elected officials. The decision to wage war and the manner in which it is conducted must be the concern of every citizen.

Today, I do not detect this same wide interest in issues of national security among either students or our citizenry at large. Someone recently observed—I think correctly—that, “The military is at war. The nation is at the mall.” I believe this is largely true. However, we should not be surprised since our president urged us shortly after the attacks of September 11th not to let the nation’s enemies disrupt our way of life. Our leaders have not called upon the nation at large to make sacrifices nor have they welcomed public examination of current security and defense issues. We must reverse this indifference! Only through open and candid discussion can we develop better national defense policies. Furthermore, widespread debate will lead to an informed body politic that is more likely to support military action when it is necessary.

Developing National Security Strategy

The noted strategist and military historian Colin Gray once wrote, “Everything pertaining to strategy relates, or at least might relate, to everything else.”[1][1] I take his words as a warning not to focus too narrowly when examining strategic issues. In the last six years the Defense Department seems to have placed more emphasis on tactics and operations than designing meaningful strategy. If we truly are in a global war against radical Islamist insurgents—and I believe we are—then we must think in terms of a global strategy. We must view the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq and the potential for conflicts in such trouble spots as the Horn of Africa, Southeast Asia, and Iran as part of our global concerns. Thus, the United States requires a well thought-out and widely understood strategy for the ongoing world wide war. To support this strategy we need appropriate campaign plans for each nation or geographical area

where the United States is currently engaged with the enemy as well as places where we might become engaged. Finally, our leaders need to make all Americans aware of the essence of this strategy as well as the unclassified versions of campaign plans.

As committee members are aware, the first written national security strategy appeared in 1988 in response to the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, which required the president to submit an annual *national security strategy report* (NSSR) to Congress. Though criticized by many for its lack detail the document was welcomed by those who sought a single source in place of the multitude of national security directives that preceded it. However, what many previously viewed as a deficiency has today become an excess. We now have so many national strategies that our efforts are diffused. Some might even go so far as to say confused. One contemporary source shows nearly thirty “national strategies.”[2][2] The public is largely unaware of all these documents, but if they were they would find a bewildering array of policies, goals, and objectives. Even as a professional soldier many of these individual strategies perplex me. In their totality they are beyond my comprehension.

I have yet to meet someone outside of the Washington, D.C. defense community who has knowledge of any of these numerous strategies. This was not the case with the first truly global war, the Second World War, when American citizens were conscious of the strategy that placed the campaign in Europe first and then committed our forces to a coordinated advance across the Central Pacific and the Southwest Pacific. And as I noted earlier, during the Cold War sufficient information was available that citizens ably debated the strategy of containment.

There is a story behind how we as a nation arrived at the sad state of affairs we find ourselves in today. That story is important to understanding how we might improve our situation, especially when currently there is talk of a war with Iran.

The generation of young lieutenants and captains that fought in the Vietnam War returned home disillusioned with the manner in which the nation had prosecuted that war. Many left active service embittered by their experience. Others looked for scapegoats for all that had gone wrong. Among their targets of blame were a supposedly hostile media, an interfering civilian leadership, and a secretary of defense who insisted on micromanaging the conduct of operations. A smaller community of officers committed themselves to discovering the underlying causes to what they saw as a dysfunctional approach to war fighting. Some of this latter group sought fundamental reforms while others focused on closing a perceived gap between American and Soviet military capabilities.

Led and empowered by combat experienced officers who also possessed an intellectual bent such as Admiral Stansfield Turner and Generals Donn Starry and Al Gray, a small corps of officers went back to the study of military history and revisited the works of classical theorists like Carl von Clausewitz and Sun Tzu. As they developed the professional grounding that their entry-level military education had denied them, these officers abandoned the notion that overly detailed management and systems analysis have a place on the battlefield. They recognized that war with its inherent uncertainty, fog, and friction defies mechanistic thinking and checklist decision-making. Most important, they learned of the critical need to tie military actions to political objectives. They saw that the ways and means of military operations must always match the ends of policy. Moreover, they grasped that battles are only fought in support of a campaign while campaigns are carried out solely to accomplish the aims of strategy. They took heed of a North Vietnam general's admission that American armed forces never lost a battle during the Vietnam War, but, as he observed, we lost the war.

By the mid-1980s officers schooled in this different way of thinking found themselves on high-level staffs, often interacting with senior civilian officials. Here they were able to put into practice their new—some would say old but forgotten—understanding of the proper use of military force. General Colin Powell is perhaps the

perfect example of this new breed of officers whose direct and indirect impact was soon felt throughout government. Nowhere were the contributions of these differently schooled officers more important than in the drafting of the first national military strategy and contingency plans. However, their views were not narrowly focused on the military. They understood the clear need to integrate the other instruments of national power—diplomacy, economic, and informational—with the military instrument. They were avid supporters of Clausewitz' famous dictum that, "War is a continuation of policy with other means."

The concepts and the enlightened officers produced by the intellectual renaissance of the late 1970s and the 1980s were put to the test when Iraq invaded Kuwait in the summer of 1990. Neither was found wanting. A strong thread of continuity runs from the goals laid out in the 1990 edition of the *National Security Strategy of the United States* through the national policy objectives announced by President Bush on 5 August 1990 and the theater military objectives promulgated on 17 January 1991 to the missions assigned to specific military units. There were no mismatches among the *ends, means, and ways* paradigm as the nation prepared to go to war. The results achieved in Operation Desert Storm by the American military and its government and the coalition it assembled proved we had learned from the hard lessons of the Vietnam War. Cutting edge technology, well trained troops, and modern doctrine were major contributors to the quick victory. But the foundation of this victory rested on the knowledge gained by a return to the study of war from a historical and theoretical perspective.

Ironically, a handful of technically-oriented senior officers and a coterie of analysts soon began to weaken this foundation with unsupported assertions that the world had witnessed a "military technical revolution" in the Gulf War, which made much of the past irrelevant.[3][3] As an example, the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—a submarine admiral—informed us that, "the large battlefield of 200-300 miles . . . will change the nature of warfare so that people such as Sun Tzu,

Clausewitz and Mahan, may well now be wrong. With dominant battlefield awareness, much of the doctrine and tactics that have come before us will have gone before us.”[4][4] The same officer also declared that, “If you see the battlefield you win the war.”[5][5] My retort at the time was, “This is as ludicrous as saying if you see the soccer field you win the match.” First, a coach must have schooled the team how to play to have a realistic chance of winning. As another example, the Air Force Chief of Staff avowed, “In the first quarter of the 21st century, you will be able to find, fix or track, and target in near real-time, anything of consequence that moves or is located on the face of the Earth. Quite frankly, I can tell you we can do most of that today.”[6][6] My response to this unsupportable claim was that we would not “see” enemy soldiers in the basement of a building with any existing or known technologies and even when we “saw” terrorists in the village market we would not be able to separate them from innocent civilians and we would learn to our sorrow that these adversaries were of consequence. And we have! Nonetheless, this unrealistic belief in the power of technology caught on with many Defense Department officials and it soon began to influence new operational concepts, force structure, and the acquisition of weapons and equipment.

Among the more egregious examples of wasted intellectual resources was that caused by the declaration that “network-centric operations” would fundamentally change the way wars are fought. The defense community held hundreds of workshops, conferences, and seminars on network-centric operations during the late 1990s and early 2000s. From these flowed a plethora of concepts, articles, reports, and studies. Few seemed to recognize that the first ancient commander who employed messengers to carry information and instructions between units had created a network. Likewise, commanders who later employed semaphore signals, telegraphs, telephones, radios, and finally computer systems were all networking their forces, an act that usually improved tactical and operational performance. Yes,

expanding the technical idea behind the Navy's Aegis System's Cooperative Engagement Capability (CEC) to other services command and control systems as network-centric proponents advocate might well enhance the ability to exchange information and coordinate activities. But it will only represent another evolutionary advancement, not a revolutionary one. Commanders will still fight as they always have by bringing fire against the enemy and maneuvering to a position of advantage while making use of deception and psychological means to alter that enemy's perception of what is taking place.

Another non-idea that has permeated the American military to great disadvantage in recent years is that of "effects-based operations." In its worst form the concept returns systems analysis to operational planning with promise of the same sad outcome as when Mr. Robert S. McNamara directed use of a similar methodology some 40 years ago. In its most benign form effects-based operations merely suggests that commanders need to consider the effects of all their planned actions. One must ask what is novel about this thought. Any commander worth his salt considers the effects, impacts, results, consequences, outcomes or any other term that suggests what might occur because of the actions he takes. Clausewitz—who dwelt on the need to match ends and means—informed us of this requirement in his oft quoted words, "The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish . . . the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature." [7][7] Did our military forces need to expend hundreds of millions of dollars and more than five years of effort to verify this conclusion while at the same time asking industry to create costly and ill-founded software programs to support it?

Too many civilian and military leaders accepted these and the promises of other so-called transformational notions with little question. Many ideas had no substantive content beneath the slogans used to advertise them. Those such as

“battle management” suggested that leaders actually could manage battles as if they were a construction project or production process. Military professionals know wars, campaigns, and battles have their own dynamics that will cause them to unfold in unexpected ways. To believe one can manage them is the same as believing a canoeist cannot only navigate his craft, but also manage the stream in which he floats. “Information superiority” implied that there was an identifiable universe of information in every wartime situation that commanders could measure to judge when they had the superior amount. Advocates intimated that gaining this superiority guaranteed battlefield success. Senior officials looking for apparent cost saving measure were only too eager to accept these kinds of vacuous notions. I remain convinced that advancement of these sorts of inane ideas undermined much of work done after the Vietnam War and directly contributed to the faulty decision-making leading up to the invasion of Iraq. Having only a mere inkling of the Iraqi society our senior leaders believed that “decapitation” of the regime would lead to a preordained and happy outcome. Thus, they never developed an operational design for securing Iraq; rather they directed preparation of a military only operations plan for the attack and seizure of Baghdad.

We have arrived at a point where once again Congress must work to see that well founded strategic thinking takes center stage within the Executive Branch. Similarly, the Legislative Branch must insist that we have a global wartime strategy with supporting campaign plans. And it must ensure that that the Department of Defense builds these plans with a through understanding of the security problems they are to alleviate and that their designs are conceptually sound.

An Approach to Tackling Difficult National Security Problems

America is a nation filled with problem solvers who seem to favor analytical or engineering methods. An analytical approach is a powerful one for those difficulties whose underlying logic or organizing system is linear. Authorities sometimes refer to these systems as “structurally complex.” Structurally complex systems can have many diverse elements. In fact, the more elements or parts in the system the more complex

it becomes. As an example, an airplane is more complex than an automobile. However, in these systems the freedom of action of the parts is limited. In fact, too much freedom of action can cause the system to malfunction. Actions among the parts of structurally complex systems follow a path of cause and effect, thus they lend themselves to the tools of systems analysis. To illustrate, an aerodynamic flaw in a newly designed airplane is likely to be a structurally complex problem. Aeronautical engineers may find it extremely difficult to solve, however, they know that the laws of Newtonian Physics, if properly applied, will allow them to determine the cause of the problem and to develop a solution. We find that individuals experienced in a particular field usually are able to move rapidly from efforts at problem definition to the steps required for problem solving.

Too few American recognize a second class of problems, those whose underlying logic or organizing system is dynamic or non-linear. Analytical approaches are usually inadequate for this class of problems. Authorities often call these systems "interactively complex." These systems frequently have great freedom of action among their elements or parts. Thus, rather than cause and effect, we frequently observe cascading effects where a single cause produces multiple outcomes that ripple through the system in all directions. In theory we should be able to trace the results or effects of each action. In reality we cannot follow them in any meaningful sense because the interactions quickly progress to a point where no computer can handle the calculations needed to track them. To illustrate, even a bounded problem like that found in the game of chess allows for more potential interactions than there are atoms in the universe. The interactions in these sorts of systems can and often do produce unanticipated and disproportionate results. What leader could have imagined in June 1914 that two pistol shots fired at Archduke Franz Ferdinand as he visited Sarajevo would set in motion all the events leading up to the horrors of the First World War? Systems analysis is the wrong tool for attacking interactively complex problems. And as John Gaddis, the "dean" of diplomatic historians notes, so

are the “scientific” methods of political science.[8][8] International relations, economies, and social systems are all examples of interactively complex systems. War itself is interactively complex.

If we understand interactively complex problems we ought to grasp that taking action in societal or national security settings frequently creates multiple reactions that for any practical purpose are unknowable beforehand. Appreciating this, our nation’s leaders should be more humble when forecasting the results of specific actions in the international arena. Certainly this should be the case when they contemplate confronting Iran or any other nation with military force.

In 1973 Urban designers Horst Rittel and Melvin Weber wrote a seminal article in which they coined the terms “wicked” and “tame” to classify problems.[9][9] Though they did not use the nomenclature of interactively and structurally complex systems in association with wicked and tame problems there is a definite relationship. In an effort to improve operational design the Army and Marine Corps are exploring the insights gained from Rittel and Weber’s research and related work. A recent paper authored for this project explains the key characteristics of wicked problems. An extract from that paper is included here to further explain why wicked problems are so distinctive.

There is no definitive way to formulate a wicked problem. First of all, a problem does not exist objectively. What exists is a *mess*—a complex tangle of conditions—which only becomes a problem when someone decides that the conditions are unsatisfactory and require resolution. We can attribute the problem to any number of different causes and can formulate the problem in any number of different ways. The formulation of the problem depends on individual perspective—different people see the problem differently—and so it is difficult, if not impossible, to formulate the problem in a way that all stakeholders can agree to. Any understanding of a wicked problem is an interpretation—a creation based on a particular perspective—rather than an objective truth. In this sense, a wicked problem cannot be *known*, but must be *constructed*—that is, the problem to be solved must be created out of the mess. Understanding a wicked problem is not a matter of

capturing reality sufficiently correctly, but of constructing an interpretation that is sufficiently useful in dealing with the reality.

We cannot understand a wicked problem without proposing a solution. The information needed to understand the problem depends on the idea for solving it. We propose potential solutions as a way of hypothesizing about the problem. Establishing the problem and conceiving a solution are identical and simultaneous cognitive processes, since every instance of creatively formulating the problem points in the direction of a particular solution.

Wicked problems have no "stopping rule." It is impossible to say conclusively that a wicked problem has been solved. Wicked problems are rarely solved conclusively, but are resolved conditionally and temporarily. Work on a wicked problem does not cease because the problem is definitively solved, but because the problem solvers run out of time, resources or resolve—the solution is deemed "good enough" or "the best that can be done under the circumstances."

Wicked problems have better or worse solutions, not right or wrong ones. There is no objective measure of success in dealing with wicked problems. No objective method exists for determining the correctness of a solution, as exists for a mathematics or physics problem. Different stakeholders will judge the quality of a solution based on individual perspectives, and there can be significant disagreement. The quality of a solution depends on how we have formulated the problem. For example, if we see the problem as defeating guerrillas, a kinetic solution may work, but if we see the problem as preventing the population from supporting the guerrillas, that same solution could be counterproductive.

There is no immediate and no ultimate test of a solution to a wicked problem. The perceived quality of a solution can change over time. Any solution will generate waves of repercussions that ripple outward over an extended or even indefinite period. A solution that seems to achieve positive results initially could generate delayed negative consequences that outweigh any initial good that was achieved. One cannot judge the full consequences of a course of action until these waves of repercussions have run out, by which point it will long have become impossible to isolate individual causes and effects, since in the mean time numerous other events will have affected the situation.

Every solution to a wicked problem is a "one-shot" operation. Every attempted course of action has repercussions that will change the situation and cannot be undone. Even if a course of action does not solve the problem satisfactorily, and another attempt becomes necessary, it will be an attempt

to solve a different problem—and often a problem that is more difficult than before. As a result, every attempt matters significantly. Wicked problems thus pose a dilemma: we cannot learn about a wicked problem without trying out solutions, but cannot try out solutions without changing the problem.

Wicked problems have no fixed set of potential solutions. Solutions to wicked problems do not pre-exist as alternatives from which to choose, like buying a new car. Wicked problems are not multiple-choice. Solutions must be *created* rather than chosen. A whole host of potential solutions may emerge, or it may be that no satisfactory solution appears. *Every wicked problem is essentially unique and novel.* Each wicked problem is a one-of-a-kind situation requiring a custom solution rather than a standard solution modified to fit circumstances. No classes of wicked problems exist for which common principles apply and to which generic solution “templates” can be applied.

Every wicked problem is a symptom of another problem. Wicked problems tend to be interconnected in cause and effect. Any attempt to establish the cause of a problem reveals a preceding problem, of which the original problem is only a symptom. Significant judgment is required merely to decide how widely to define the problem. *Wicked problems are interactively complex.* Interactive complexity is a function of the freedom of interaction of the elements that make up a situation: the greater freedom, the greater the interactive complexity. Interactively complex situations are highly sensitive to inputs; immeasurably small influences can generate disproportionately large effects. With interactive complexity it is often impossible to isolate individual causes and their effects, since the parts are all connected in a complex web. Interactive complexity produces fundamentally unpredictable and even counterintuitive behavior. Cause and effect may be separated in time and space: an input at a given time and place produces an output much later at a different place. Effects will rarely remain steady; some causal chains may dampen over time, eventually dying out, while others may amplify through reinforcing feedback. Effects may reverse themselves over time: a cause that has one effect initially may produce the opposite effect later—only to return to the original effect still later. A single cause can have multiple effects, while a single effect can be the result of multiple causes. Major inputs can have little effect, but a minor input beyond a tipping point can push a situation into a qualitatively different state.[10][10]

In essence Rittel and Weber told us that while we might find a so-called tame problem very hard to solve, we would know where to begin. An example often used

to illustrate this idea is working a crossword puzzle. I might not be able to complete a particularly difficult crossword puzzle, but it is not because I do not know how to approach the problem. I realize what I am supposed to do, but in this case I am not smart enough to succeed. Others with more talent following the same rule-set would be successful. In contrast, each wicked problem is unique, thus, there are no standard methods or approaches for solving them. The uniqueness of each of these problems precludes ordered analysis. We must view them holistically with the first order of business being to “frame” or “formulate” the problem. The most effective way to do this for societal problems like those of national security is to bring experts from many disparate fields together and to enter into a discourse. In exploring the problem through the experiences of many people insights are gained that can inform us on how to move forward.

Chairman Tierney's Opening Statement to this Subcommittee's meeting on 30 October 2007 serves as an excellent example of the how to begin to grapple with the complex problem presented by Iran.

We need to ask several basic questions. What makes Iranians tick? What drives and motivates their behavior? Do Iranians want democracy? Are they resoundingly anti-American, or are there opportunities for improvements in our relationship? How can we reintegrate Iran into the global economy and get them to adhere to international human rights standards? And, given our lack of connection over the last thirty years, what don't we know; where are our blind spots?

By understanding Iranians and building our knowledge of the intricacies in our fractured relationship, the Subcommittee will be able to conduct our Constitutionally-mandated oversight; to find out if the current Administration has thought through all of these issues adequately and thoroughly, and to ask tough questions that get to the heart of the myriad of issues involved.[11][11]

I urge Subcommittee members to continue to view the current situation with Iran as a “wicked” problem that is interactively complex. As you learn more about the U.S.—Iranian problem within the context of the larger Middle East dilemma and the ongoing global Islamist insurgency, you will increase the odds that you can persuade the Executive Branch from making the same tragic mistakes America has experienced since 2002. If you were to convince your House and Senate colleagues to engage in an expanded professional discourse about U.S.—Iranian relations you would heighten the chances even further of a favorable outcome. Lastly, if the Legislative Branch were to engage the Executive Branch in a widening discourse on this vital issue, I believe we would see American government at its finest. Certainly this is a course of action that every American would applaud. Fundamentally, this is the kind of leadership our citizens desire from their elected representatives.

Again, I thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to share my thoughts.