



U.S. Department of Defense
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)
News Transcript

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Presenter: Amb. Eric Edelman, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy September 28, 2006 12:45 PM EDT

Amb. Edelman's Remarks at the Department of State and Department of Defense Counterinsurgent Conference at the Ronald Reagan Building, Wash. D.C.

Good afternoon. I am honored to have the opportunity to address you today.

Before starting, I would like to start by recognizing and thanking a few people here. First, I'd like to thank our foreign visitors and partners for participating in this Conference, in particular LTG John Kiszley, Mr. Chris Donnelly, and Dr. David Kilcullen for their performance as speakers or moderators. Second, I want to recognize LTG Dave Petraeus for participating. I believe he was a co-founder of sorts with John Hillen in giving intellectual birth to this conference. I also want to thank John Hillen and Jeb Nadaner for their work for co-sponsoring the conference and devoting their staffs to all the arduous work involved. So last, but certainly not least, thanks to Dr. Janine Davidson, Alexa Courtney from Jeb's staff and Tom Cooney and Donna Hopkins from John's staff for their efforts to pull this off and make it a productive conference.

In co-sponsoring this event, John Hillen and Jeb Nadaner rightly recognize that success in counterinsurgency and in the global war on terror, requires a government-wide approach. Their interagency collaboration on this project is the kind of leadership we need today – and I applaud them for it. I encourage you all to sustain the momentum that has begun here this week. This is the most important national security issue of our time. We simply must get it right.

As many of you know, I am a career Foreign Service Officer. But I have served in the White House and, for the past year, I have been Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. Given this interagency perspective, I would like to share with you some of my thoughts on the importance of a unified approach to the challenges we face in counterinsurgency and the War on Terror.

IRAQ and AFGHANISTAN

Iraq and Afghanistan are currently the main battlegrounds in the global war on terror. In both countries, we are attempting to promote: the development of democratic and accountable institutions; the commitment to the rule of law; the effective delivery of public services; while also simultaneously fighting to neutralize a violent insurgency.

The scope of the challenges we face in these countries is daunting, but we and our international partners are learning and adapting.

Great progress has been made on the ground by our civilians and our military, who have learned to work together and have adapted in innovative ways to meet these challenges. But for every ingenious adaptation we see in the field, we should ask ourselves - what institutional failure were they trying to overcome? What tools did we fail to provide them?

Our experience in Iraq and Afghanistan reinforces the need to develop better non-military capabilities and processes for integrating civilian and military efforts.

Indeed, the President's Strategy for Victory in Iraq identifies eight "strategic pillars." Only 2 of these 8 pillars (fighting terrorists and training Iraqi Security Forces) rely predominantly on the military. The rest, including promoting good governance, economic development, diplomacy, and rule of law issues, require expertise from the civilian side of government.

This perspective has been repeatedly reinforced by historical experience and "classic" COIN theory. As British General Sir Frank Kitson warned: "the first thing that must be apparent when contemplating the sort of action which a government facing insurgency should take, is that there can be no such thing as a purely military solution because insurgency is not primarily a military activity." French infantry officer and counterinsurgent expert, David Galula, also emphasizes this theme, claiming that counterinsurgency requires an approach that is 80% political, and only 20% military.

Although military personnel in both Iraq and Afghanistan have been engaged in many of these non-military activities, these are not areas in which the military seeks, nor should, take the lead. Military commanders on the ground need the expertise of the other agencies of our government to help them get the job done. In DoD, we believe that the military component should ideally be in support of the broader civilian-led effort, in order to put a particular country on a sustainable, stable trajectory. Coordinating such a civil-military approach to COIN is a difficult task; but our own history demonstrates that it can be done and provides us with useful lessons to help us meet the irregular challenges we face today.

AMERICA has a LONG HISTORY IN COIN

As we approach the task of developing unity of effort in conducting these missions, we should look to our own experiences for insight. Max Boot's bestselling book, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, outlines the long history of U.S. forces in "small wars," from the Barbary Wars in the early 19th century, to 20th century conflicts in the Philippines, the Caribbean and Vietnam. Indeed, for over 200 years, Americans have conducted operations we would today call "irregular war;" but somehow we have lost this historical thread and have failed to institutionalize lessons from this experience. Bruce Hoffman of RAND refers to this American cycle of re-learning in counterinsurgency as a "groundhog day" scenario in which we repeatedly repress these memories and simply revert to basic bureaucratic instincts. We then have to relearn the same lessons over and over again. It is time to reverse that trend.

The re-discovery of the 1940 Marine Corps Small Wars Manual as well as the new Army-Marine Corps Field Manual on COIN are, in part, steps in re-capturing the existing font of historical knowledge. But we still have a long way to go.

A look at past efforts reveals many lessons and a few warnings. I would like to highlight four in particular that I think are relevant today: 1) the importance of unity of effort; 2) the need to overcome bureaucratic inertia; 3) the importance of adaptation and learning and 4) the need for cultural knowledge.

1. Unity of Effort:

One of the most important lessons we can take from our own history in counterinsurgency is the need for unity of effort. Past experience reveals that despite rhetoric expounding the virtues of a clear unified civil-military approach, unified government effort has repeatedly proven to be an elusive goal. Some of the same issues we struggled with in Somalia, Haiti, and the Balkans in the 1990's, and in Iraq and Afghanistan today were debated as far back as 1898 between General Arthur MacArthur and his civilian counterpart in the Philippines, William H. Taft. Experience demonstrates that when faced with this challenge, there is little substitute for leadership.

In Vietnam, we struggled with this as well; but eventually developed what Gen Creighton Abrams described as a "One War" approach, "with all of us on one side and the enemy on the other." The clearest reflection of this approach was the Civil Operations and Revolutionary (later "Rural") Development Support program, known as CORDS. CORDS managed to achieve a combined civilian and military effort by eventually developing a clear chain of command toward a single objective. Civilian contributions to CORDS included several civilian agencies working with their military partners, including among others, the Central Intelligence Agency, Agency for International Development, U.S. Information Service, and State Department. These civilian-military teams worked closely with their Vietnamese counterparts to meet the needs of the population and also develop better intelligence to identify and defeat Viet Cong. CORDS was an instrumental element in clearing the insurgency from 93% of South Vietnam's villages.

Unfortunately, because of the controversies and trauma surrounding the Vietnam War at the conclusion of this conflict, much of this type of experience was summarily repressed.

I know that many of the people in this room have begun to examine the CORDS model more closely to determine what lessons might be applicable today. Whatever lessons we recapture from that experience, and whatever new lessons we learn from Iraq and Afghanistan today, I urge you not to repeat the mistake of assuming that we will never do anything similar – on a larger or a smaller scale – again. We simply cannot predict - or choose – the types of challenges we will face in the future. But our 200-year history makes it fairly clear that the problem of unity of effort has been a perennial one.

2. Need to overcome bureaucratic inertia

Bob "Blowtorch" Komer, the man who developed the CORDS concept, in a critical study for RAND in 1972 identified the dysfunctional institutional that hindered the effort in Vietnam. In "Bureaucracy Does Its Thing" Komer points out that in Vietnam even though many in the individual bureaucracies knew what needed to be done, and even though there were high level policies in place articulating the right strategy, individual organizations tended to revert to the tasks they were designed to conduct rather than adapting to the circumstances on the ground. They optimized for success in their respective stovepipes, but this resulted in less-than-optimal outcomes for the overall endeavor.

For example, the U.S. military, which was designed to fight the Soviet Union in conventional warfare, applied inappropriate strategies and tactics against the Vietcong. As Komer says, "we fought the enemy our way – at horrendous cost and with tragic side effects – because we lacked the incentive and much existing capability to do otherwise."

Even worse for counterinsurgency, where a key objective is to assist the host nation in developing its own capabilities, we transferred this orientation to the Vietnamese military:

"Molding conventional Vietnamese armed forces in the 'mirror image' of the U.S. forces... was a natural institutional reaction. [Komer claimed] We organized, equipped, and trained the [Vietnamese] to fight American style, the only way we knew how."

Fortunately, and thanks to the efforts of those like Generals Petraeus, Dempsey, Eikenberry, Durbin and many others in the Coalition, I believe we have avoided making this mistake in Iraq and Afghanistan. Working with the host nations in these states, we are not creating, nor have we attempted to create, a "mirror image" of our own military. Instead, we are helping to build forces that can counter their respective insurgencies and which can be sustained by the host nation.

Komer's warning, however, is equally valid for other parts of our government and others which are helping partners and allies develop counterinsurgency capabilities. Whether helping others or working independently, the tendency for bureaucracies and bureaucrats to revert to their comfort zones is a real threat, and something we cannot afford as we carry out our strategy in the War on Terror. Your efforts this week, and more importantly,

what you do after this week, will help ensure that the bureaucracies in which we all work are the focal points for cross-cutting, strategic solutions rather than individualized institutional roadblocks.

3. Need to be a “learning organization”

One way to guard against such bureaucratic inertia is to design systems that promote institutional learning. This need to learn and adapt on the fly is another key lesson from past experience in counterinsurgency. As Bernard Fall tersely observed of the need for constant adaptation in COIN, “If it works, it is obsolete.”

So, we must develop a unified, government-wide approach to contemporaneous experiential learning – the kind of organizational, bottom-up learning LTC John Nagl talks about in his justly celebrated book, *Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. According to LTC Nagl, a key to success in these missions is organizational adaptability – that is the ability to learn and adapt to the changing circumstances on the ground faster than the enemy does. Or, to put it another way, we need to be able to “get inside the enemy’s learning loop.”

Since the Vietnam War the U.S. military has developed remarkable systems to capture lessons learned from the field and disseminate the knowledge gained rapidly throughout the training system. It is this system that has enabled the U.S. military to make steady improvements to many of their tactics, techniques, and procedures in Iraq and Afghanistan, such as patrolling, check points, and cordon and knock procedures.

Current examples in Iraq demonstrate that many of our commanders are both applying lessons from the past and adapting contemporaneously. Yesterday you heard from Colonel H.R. McMaster and Lieutenant General Dave Petraeus, whose approaches in Tal Afar and Mosul set examples for others. Likewise, Major General, Peter Chiarelli’s experience in Baghdad, and his emphasis on improving city infrastructure, provided a framework that has been integrated into military doctrine and concepts. What is important is that these leaders are actively spreading the word and sharing their experiences via lectures, briefings, and articles. This is leading to organizational learning as these lessons are filtered into the training and education systems. A key vehicle for this process is General Casey’s COIN academy – established in theater last year – which provides unit leaders with the most up-to-date knowledge of insurgency approaches for Iraq. Together, these leaders epitomize our commitment to learning and adapting. They are setting an example that is spreading throughout the system.

This system is a tremendous improvement on the Vietnam-era system. It provides a strong framework for developing an interagency lessons learned system that will be more responsive to the civil-military requirements of counterinsurgency. To meet the challenges we face today, these systems should be adapted in two ways:

First, the tactically-oriented approach to capturing lessons in the field was originally designed to address only part of the challenge in COIN – primarily the “kinetic” side. We should maintain those programs that are helping our soldiers stay ahead of the enemy’s tactics. But, we should also work to develop similar lessons learned programs that capture and disseminate new knowledge about the non-kinetic mission areas such as governance, reconstruction, and rule of law.

Second, as Lieutenant General Petraeus mentioned yesterday, these learning systems must be applied across all agencies of government in an integrated fashion – so that as lessons are identified, the strategy is adjusted in a coherent, unified way.

At this point, I would like to emphasize the point that learning within our organizations must also take place with respect to the development of indigenous capacity. Many parts of the US and allied governments are helping Iraq, Afghanistan and other states develop capabilities that are key to preventing or defeating insurgencies. These efforts are focused on police, justice systems, border forces, customs, counter-narcotics, intelligence, and agriculture to name a few. All of us should be working hard—and learning—to ensure we are not only helping in the right areas, but truly helping in a way that will produce durable capabilities.

4. Cultural Knowledge

Finally, in order to succeed in COIN and stability operations, we must understand the cultures with which we are operating. This is actually much more difficult than it sounds. Truly understanding another culture requires more than speaking a language or knowing certain social customs so that we do not offend our hosts. Certainly those things are important. But to truly have an impact, and to do more good than harm, we must understand the social power structures that informally govern societies as well as the internal motivations of the enemy and the people. In short, we need to develop an anthropological approach to understanding our enemies.

What motivates them at the individual and social level? To what extent is the conflict about religion, or economics, or ideology, vs. other grievances?

Our enemies understand the importance of cultural factors. Indeed, today's conflicts are catalyzed by the enemy's ability to tap into "cultural narratives" of a host population, gain their support, and grow. Our challenge is to understand this dynamic and learn to counter it.

As the citizens of Iraq and Afghanistan begin to build a strong new sense of "national identity" - one that trumps the appeal of violent transnational extremists - our goal is to help them achieve that vision. Our ability to assist rests on our ability to understand - at a cultural level - the factors influencing their struggle.

Our intelligence processes and education and training systems must adapt to the need to obtain, analyze, and disseminate cultural knowledge. And by dissemination, I mean to everyone who needs it. It does no good for the military or anyone else to collect information if they do not share it with their interagency, coalition, private, and non-governmental partners.

These four observations from history are only a start. There are surely more lessons to be learned from a careful examination of our past experience.

In the time I have left I want to move to the present and say a few words about the nature of the challenge we face today.

NEW STRATEGY AND TOOLS FOR THE GLOBAL INSURGENCY

The effort to learn from the past is relevant not only to Afghanistan and Iraq, but also to the global insurgency we face more broadly. Although much progress has been made in crippling the leadership of the Al-Qaeda network, it would be premature to declare victory and simply come home as some have suggested.

It would also be unwise to assume that in order to defeat this enemy we will not need new tools.

A number of scholars have asserted that today's insurgencies have evolved. For instance, today's enemy is highly adaptive, trans-nationally connected, media-savvy, and networked. In this environment, we cannot blindly graft old methods onto new strategies. We must determine what "classic" counterinsurgency approaches still work and what new approaches are required. This necessitates an adaptation of our traditional counterinsurgency theory.

One example of this dilemma is troop strength. What is the proper ratio of security forces (military and police) to a given population? An often cited rule of thumb is approximately 20 soldiers per 1000 residents. A recent study by the Army's Combat Studies Institute in Fort Leavenworth attempted to derive the "right" ratio based on historical analysis. Although the numbers varied significantly across cases, the average turned out to be 13.26 soldiers per 1000 inhabitants or 91.82 residents per soldier. But, the study's own Forward warns that these results "cannot be used to guarantee victory by simply putting a certain number of soldiers 'on the ground' relative to the indigenous population. The percentages and numbers in the study are merely historical averages, with all the dangers inherent in any average figure."

This is but one example of the difficulty in attempting to find easy to apply scientific rules of thumb to the Art of counterinsurgency. Evolution by the enemy requires that we exercise extreme care in our application of COIN principles learned from past experience. In his recent article "Counterinsurgency Redux," David Kilcullen warns

that “classical theory is necessary, but not sufficient, for contemporary counterinsurgency. Mastering it may require new mental models.” I agree. He proposes, for instance, that modern COIN may not be 80% political, as David Galula suggests, but rather 100% political due to the nature of the global media and the increased relevance of public perception and political outcomes vs. battlefield victories. Every combat action sends a political message – nearly instantaneously – in this new environment. This places increased emphasis on the integration of military operations with strategic communications.

Strategic communications – or the ability to counter the insurgents’ messages through words and deeds – has historically been a monumental challenge in counterinsurgency. Commenting on his experience in Algeria in the 1950’s, Galula asserted that “If there was a field in which we were definitely and infinitely more stupid than our opponents, it was propaganda.” I think many of us believe that statement continues to apply, perhaps with even greater force, today.

Ironically, crafting an all-of-government strategic communications strategy for today’s threat is both enabled and complicated by new technologies in the internet age. Traditionally, our comparative advantage in warfare has been technology. Communications technology has enabled a network-centric approach to warfare that gives us greater battlefield awareness than ever before. At the high end of the conflict spectrum it has enabled us to win spectacular victories on the battlefield in Iraq and Afghanistan, in the major combat phases.

On the other hand, the enemy is also enabled by technology. At this lower end of the conflict spectrum the advantage in use of these technologies may shift to our enemies. As a global insurgent movement, Al Qaeda uses the internet as a “virtual sanctuary” where it promotes its ideological vision, raises funds, recruits and trains new members around the globe. Counter-terrorism expert, Audrey Cronin, observes that the internet is facilitating a “cyber-enabled mass mobilization” of such enemies. According to Cronin, this “cyber-mobilization” is the 21st century version of the French *levee en masse*, which revolutionized warfare in the 19th century by allowing a nation-state to raise nationalist armies with common sense of commitment. Today’s “*levee en masse*” looks much different, as it is global, non-territorial, and disconnected from the nation-state. Yet it may be no less revolutionary. Our ability to understand this phenomenon and to use our own technological advantages to counter it, will be a key enabler of victory in our current struggle. Likewise, we should consider how we might help our partners develop capabilities to do the same.

In sum, today’s insurgencies require careful consideration of our past experience and prudent application of historical lessons learned. From methods of organization to fund raising and the use of media and technology, today’s adaptive enemy has learned from the past and has evolved. As he learns and adapts, so must we.

Adaptation will be complex and challenging, even within our individual organizations. I know that changing my one component of the Office of the Secretary of Defense has been all consuming. Success will require adaptations that cross the bureaucratic lines of the executive branch and are developed with the close collaboration and support of the Congress.

We have some successful new tools thanks to close interagency cooperation and support from Capitol Hill: The Commander’s Emergency Response Program lets U.S. forces quickly meet the needs of the local population; Section 1207 authority lets the Department of Defense shift resources in extremis to the State Department for urgent stabilization missions; Section 1206 authority lets us more quickly train and equip partners when an opportunity or need arises.

These and other recent adaptations have come mostly from the urgent needs of this war rather than from a comprehensive strategic review of how the nation can meet new challenges. But more strategic processes are taking root. Ambassador Tobias is leading the transformation of foreign assistance; Ambassador Herbst is continuing the development of S/CRS; DoD is implementing QDR roadmaps for Irregular Warfare, Strategic Communications, and Building Partnership Capacity. This year, DoD will consolidate its proposals for building partnership capacity into a single piece of legislation. With leadership and vision, such efforts can provide a solid foundation for more sweeping changes to foreign and security assistance that will give us all the tools we need to integrate our efforts and meet the challenges of global insurgency.

In his address to the nation on September 11th this year, the president said that "The war against this enemy is more than a military conflict. It is the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century, and the calling of our generation." Your presence here today signals that you are answering this call. The solutions you derive – from both a study of history and an analysis of the evolving security environment – will have great consequences for our nation and the world.

In closing, I would like to thank you all for your service in this important endeavor and encourage you again to sustain this momentum.

With that I would be happy to answer your questions.