

CARUSELLE & MESSING: Adaptation or decimation

Americans must fight smarter or risk excessive casualties

By Allen J. Caruselle and F. Andy Messing

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Illustration: Afghan drugs by Linas Garsys for The Washington Times

"[Afghanistan](#) is not [Iraq](#)," [Gen. David H. Petraeus](#) acknowledged as he scrambled to resurrect the viable elements of ousted [Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal](#)'s flawed counterinsurgency strategy for [Afghanistan](#). He no doubt will attempt to combine these elements with his own experiences in [Iraq](#), even as [Iraq](#) falters into a new cycle of sectarian violence. Both situations are becoming so dire that [Army](#) Chief of Staff and former [Iraq](#) commander [Gen. George W. Casey Jr.](#) recently announced that we can expect "another decade or so" of war.

Amid these developments, the single element that negates any traction in [Afghanistan](#) is drugs. Drugs contribute to the dark-side problems that impact all of our efforts as flag-draped coffins continue to return home on C-17s. The drug conundrum affects the political, social, economic and security situation of the Afghan conflict. Drugs affect the promotion of normally sound ideas - such as establishing civil defense units - which under current circumstances likely would evolve into more armed drug producers. To borrow from [James Carville](#), "It's the drugs, stupid," as the Colombians have learned firsthand. Dealing head-on with drug issues, Colombians have started turning their nation away from decades of life-sucking narco-problems. This was

manifested in their recent election, a relatively peaceful and meaningful event that reinforced their sovereignty.

The entire situation in [Afghanistan](#) has been exacerbated by the insistence of the conventional [U.S. military on battling insurgents](#) with tanks and company-sized formations tramping through the mountains, Soviet style. Successful concepts that were developed in [the Philippines](#) in the late 1940s and early '50s by then-[Col. Edward Lansdale](#) for dealing with terrorists and using the minimum of force are forgotten. Things like the hard end of the equation - killing the enemy - must be done with a scalpel, leaving the sledgehammer alone.

To quote retired [Master Sgt. Bruce Hazelwood](#), the senior [Special Forces](#) adviser among the 55 who advised [El Salvador](#) during the successful conclusion of its conflict in 1991, "You need irregular warriors to fight irregular wars." Irregular warriors understand and practice the concepts of Sun Tzu and the hierarchy of needs put forward by [Abraham Maslow](#). The American psychologist held that most basic human needs for survival - water, food, health, shelter and safety - must be met in order and, equally important, sustained before one can begin exercising concepts like creativity and democratic processes such as voting.

Additionally, it has long been acknowledged by irregular warriors that all aid must be given in a conditional fashion, following the model forwarded by fellow psychologist B.F. Skinner. In applying this view, aid becomes a reinforcement used positively and negatively in order to influence the recipient's behavior in a desired fashion. This idea has been used imperfectly and sporadically in [Afghanistan](#) as the United States continues to pour in economic, military and social-service aid, almost wastefully.

Also, America must get away from the Hollywood genre of war, exemplified by John Wayne's portrayals in various war movies. Hollywood has colored the American perception of how war is waged, in the minds of both the public and the politicians. This way of war is not germane, although military training institutions continue to base their curricula on some of these fractured ideas of warfare. Instead, they should be focusing on making our military leaders more knowledgeable in the conduct and practice of irregular warfare, with its integration of modern technology. We must find new ways to project power in an economical manner, moving away from the influence of the military-industrial complex that shapes both political and military strategies, as President Eisenhower warned.

As the American economy continues to stumble, costly open-checkbook engagements halfway around the world will become unsustainable. Horrifically, we easily will exceed 6,000 military war dead soon. Our best allies also are losing their sons and daughters. Strategies that are efficient must be devised to keep innovative and relentless enemies at bay. Narco-guerrilla and terrorist conflicts must be defined and treated as such. Commanders of forces specifically designed and educated to deal with them should be in charge, not leaders who grew up defending Germany's Fulda Gap during the Cold War and applied conventional methods to irregular matters.

We must become more adaptive and proactive immediately, or [Gen. Casey's](#) warning of another decade of high-pitched conflict will come to pass.

Allen J. Caruselle is a three-tour Iraq Marine infantry veteran and research assistant at the National Defense Council Foundation. F. Andy Messing, a retired [Special Forces](#) major, is a foundation board member and has traveled to 27 conflicts worldwide.

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