

Full-spectrum security

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There will be nothing irregular or special about terrorism and insurgent warfare in the 21st century. Nuclear deterrents and firm identities make full-scale war between developed nations unlikely. Meanwhile, the regions most likely to boil into chaos lack economic, military, political and social unity. Comparatively weak, potential foes turn to asymmetrical combat: hiding among civilians, attacking only weakness and conducting psychological and cyber warfare.

Contrastingly, American policy continues to focus on glitzy technology and high-end destructive capability. While the Air Force spends \$200 billion developing the Joint Strike Fighter for conflict against an imagined future superpower, existing low-tech enemies display far greater fear of decades-old AC-130 gunships and low-cost Special Forces. Misplaced priorities and their associated weight are merely first in a long line of problems endangering the nation's security.

America faces a wide range of threats using a narrow set of inappropriate tools. Nuclear terrorism, small arms proliferation and the continually smoldering conflicts of the Third World are only three of many new dangers constantly taking new forms.

Against this rising tide, America seems content with its two traditional policies: diplomacy and conventional warfare. This rigid mindset, however, ignores resourceful methods for discreetly applying force.

America must engage the many emerging threats without sapping its strength. An evolving strategy must use information, creativity and careful planning to achieve victory without battle. Full-spectrum security will require expanded human intelligence to gauge enemy intentions, a revived covert operations program to undermine and discredit opponents, and even-better trained special operations forces (SOF) for counterterrorism and regime change.

In effect, American policy must segue into a form of futuristic "gladiator warfare," which could reduce total turmoil.

In the Cold War, America regularly engaged intelligence sources and exfiltrated defectors to safety. However, pinpointing and tracking potential enemies has become more difficult while the need for human intelligence has skyrocketed. Where conventional intelligence networks are mostly ineffective, more ingenious solutions are needed. Bounties for information on threatening individuals may prove more efficient than direct pursuit. A global whistleblowers policy, for scientists, military officers and government officials knowing of their governments' heinous conduct or clandestine programs, should offer safety and a new life to those with reliable information.

In the long term, America will need to creatively expand intelligence contacts and improve regional specialists to engage the diverse cultures from which it needs cooperation.

Intelligence operatives must also regain permission to act pre-emptively on immediate information. These covert operations capabilities, removed from the CIA under President Carter, should be carefully reinstated. Low-profile missions, such as select psychological warfare campaigns and sabotage against weapons programs, can divert imminent threats.

Working for longer-term solutions, limited resources creatively applied can yield enormous benefits. In El Salvador, patient ambassadors and a core of 55 SOF soldiers helped win the country back from the forces of communism and drug activity. American aid guided the government toward responsibility and respect for human rights.

Now a similar struggle in Central Asia, where governments turn to authoritarianism to retain control, demands a similar solution. SOF engagement in military training and counterterror operations could reduce immediate security pressures while encouraging governments to gradually democratize to win public support. This long-term, low-footprint cooperation forms the core of a successful anti-terror strategy.

Even when faster results are needed, SOF remain cheaper and more effective than conventional military options. Regime change will continue as a necessary if unpopular tool in fighting advanced-stage weapons programs.

SOF, however, can act with appreciably lower visibility and political risk. Regime change through occupation causes difficulty solving political, economic, and social conflict in purely military terms, often destroying the institutions that bind citizens together. Irregular warriors approach the problem from a different angle: exploiting existing instability to nurture revolutionary movements; attacking surgically to induce the enemy's collapse; and having so small a footprint as to avoid post-victory administration and reconstruction, leaving intact the sentiment of popular revolution so useful in cementing national identity. A small number of American SOF advisers can win the war and remain popular long enough to win the peace.

The ancient Chinese philosopher-general Sun Tzu wrote, "Indirect tactics, efficiently applied, are as inexhaustible as Heaven and Earth." While direct tactics, poorly applied, begin to exhaust America's might, the nation needs to find new tools to give leaders greater flexibility to act early and often against potential dangers. America has the resolve to fight its enemies, but it must gain the wisdom to do so creatively.

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