

Sustaining the mission

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As Americans watch the events unfolding in Fallujah, Iraq, we should consider the words of the Chinese military philosopher Sun Tzu who said, "Those skilled in war subdue the enemy's army without battle. They capture his cities without assaulting them and overthrow his state without protracted operations. They conquer by strategy."

America must heed this maxim in the war against terrorism. However, we must also recognize that terrorists are really insurgents operating on a worldwide scale. Insurgencies, such as the one spawning in Thailand or underway in Iraq, are normally fought against their local government. Al Qaeda, on the other hand, challenges the legitimacy of governments that do not officially administer over its members. Therefore, the war against al Qaeda is really a macro-counterinsurgency campaign, which, ideally, is fought with minimal violence and is won by addressing the socioeconomic, political and security concerns of the insurgent population.

America has always preferred to focus its foreign policy on states, rather than individuals and organizations. Sovereign governments can be secondary supporters of insurgent movements, but are not the driving force. Instead of nations, the U.S. must begin surgically engaging individuals as well, eliminating the terrorist cause at its roots. Where possible and feasible, America can work through other governments to achieve necessary redress to the people's grievances. Otherwise, the U.S. must be prepared to work directly with locals in instances where there is no government to serve as an intermediary, such as in Somalia.

Defeating insurgents requires that they be identified, isolated from the population and have their cause discredited. Segregating the insurgents ideologically or geographically from the population is imperative, since this is their source of refuge, supply and recruits. If violent force is used, it should be done in a focused manner to avoid earning the people's ire through collateral damage, pushing them towards our enemy's cause.

Currently, America disproportionately emphasizes military force and political options, yet this parochial approach will not lead us to victory, as the socioeconomic aspects require attention as well. Undertaking civic action and civil affairs missions would allow America to address the people's needs, gain information and continue isolating the insurgents. Wherever America's military can gain access, it should render aid to populations at risk for insurgent exploitation, especially in areas too dangerous for State Department, United Nations and nongovernmental organization operations. Assistance should be custom-tailored to the region in which it is deployed and encompass medical programs, engineering projects, civil administration and plain economic help. By extending this open hand of aid - backed with the closed fist of force - America can move the population away from the terrorist's cause and toward our own.

America must start making alliances where we can most effectively bring our capabilities to bear. Through these partnerships we can begin to quarantine the insurgents and promote our cause, as we do not have unlimited financial and human resources. Medical aid in particular holds enormous promise for changing individual's perceptions of the U.S. and our campaign against global turmoil.

Health care in third world nations is generally a more basic endeavor than we are accustomed to in the West. Common health problems can

include diarrhea-induced dehydration, respiratory infections, disease from lack of clean water, and even impetigo. In addition to being inexpensive in comparison to a conventional military presence, treating these ailments can yield immediate and tangible results. Cuba, for example, has exported its medical professionals to third world nations since 1963, contributing to Fidel Castro's survivability at extremely low cost. We should consider emulating and surpassing the Cubans.

Addressing a person's medical needs sends an undeniable message of goodwill. Associating that message with America - and our armed forces in particular - can only enhance our ability to win hearts and minds. Based on the initial foundation laid by medical aid, the U.S. can get its foot in the door to introduce other civil administration initiatives and may advance President Bush's goals for democratization.

Select and proactive aid missions will allow America to engage situations that would otherwise be intractable, enhancing our national security. Civic action and civil affairs is not a realistic alternative at the moment to the operation in Fallujah, but might have prevented the escalation to violence early on. In the future, it is imperative that we bring as many helping resources to bear as possible, both governmental and private. We will not attain success using only force or even only aid. Both approaches must be employed in a synergistic fashion. However, employing more of the open hand will allow us to approach Sun Tzu's ideal of winning without fighting.

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