

GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR. THE ANTIDOTE TO GLOBAL TERRORISM?

(Pluscarden Programme Seminar, St Antony's College, Oxford, 8 May 2008)

Lt. Gen. Sir John Kiszely

Introduction

- Speaking purely personally. Not necessarily Government views or opinions.
- Scope: Unpack the title
 - Is what we face global terrorism?
 - What is the GWOT?
 - Is it an appropriate response?
 - If not, what should we be doing?

Is what we face Global Terrorism?

- Terrorism across the globe - more than one nation, across the borders of many nations. And few, if any, countries where terrorist acts in the name of Islam can be ruled out. But terrorism is a tool, a means to an end.
- The end: for some, limited political objectives (e.g. Israeli policy, US policy in Middle East); for some unlimited/less limited policy objectives (e.g. 'overthrowal' of Israeli state or US government/way of life/hegemony) i.e. insurgency. Thus transnational insurgency.
- Nature of this insurgency:
 - Network enabled. Keeping protagonists in touch, providing motivation and rationale, recruiting, providing a virtual/real world.
 - Complex, hybrid
 - Highly political.

What is the Global War On Terror?

- A term used (less and less), mainly by the USG, to describe the counter-terrorist campaign – for some, the US's campaign world-wide; for others, the (assumed) campaign by all states, acting together. In the Wilsonian tradition.
- Widely criticized as meaningless,
 - like 'the war on poverty' or 'the war on hunger';
 - you can't declare war on a tactic;
 - now more often in US, 'The Long War'; but, for some, a largely semantic change.
- GWOT is thus:
 - Both a struggle waged across the Globe, led by the US; and (the call for) action by nations across the Globe: a rallying cry.
 - A counter-terrorist campaign: one focused on killing and capturing terrorists.

Is it an appropriate response?

- Is a 'war' an appropriate response? In the sense of a struggle – yes. But problems of legitimacy, ethics, law. (What price Habeas Corpus?). Could be seen to be/taken to 'justify' policy, action or conduct appropriate to wartime.
- Is a counter-terrorist campaign an appropriate response to an insurgency?

- The nature of counter-terrorism is a counter-criminal activity; 'attritional' (kill/capture until there are none left); kinetic; military/police business.
- The nature of COIN rather different, because:
 - Insurgency (and COIN): a battle for minds. Ideological/psychological dimension paramount.
 - Transnational insurgency:
 - New, hybrid, complex
 - Well matched to the inherent vulnerabilities of modern states (e.g. hi-tech infrastructure; liberal democracies)
 - Facilitated by modern communications, especially the internet; and global media; facilitating the propaganda of the deed.
 - The cause – presently `radical Islamist` (a perversion of Islam).
 - Advent of (reappearance of) the suicide bomber: effect not only physical but psychological – the martyr, self-sacrifice, passion; for us a highly immoral act, but for the perpetrator the acme of moral act – `dying for justice`; emphasising the importance (and `morality`) of the cause.
 - Galula: `The insurgent needs so little to achieve so much whereas the counter-insurgent needs so much to achieve so little.`
- Applying counter-terrorism to transnational insurgency.
 - Treats effects, ignores causes. Treatment often counter-productive – plays into insurgents` hands: recruiting sergeant. Was always the case; but now even more so
 - Era of the suicide bomber
 - Era of global media, especially internet
 - Likely to be led by the military/police (a counter-criminal activity); and to miss (or grossly underestimate) the ideological dimension.
 - The staircase/escalator model of insurgency. Exacerbation.
 - Counter-terrorism plays a part (very important one); indeed, it is one of the main means, but only one.
 - And it is only a means – and subservient to the COIN. Clausewitz: `War...merely a continuation of policy by other means...War should never be thought of as *something autonomous*, but always as an *instrument of policy*.` (emphasis in original).
 - Why make such a mistake?
 - Poor reading of history. Un-systemic lessons-learned process.
 - Poor understanding of culture (and of its importance). Assuming other people share our cultural assumptions. (Lack of imagination and education).
 - Love of simplification, encouraged by the media esp. TV, leading to lack of real understanding; militaries particularly susceptible to this.
 - Kinetic means close at hand/available/hi-tech.
 - Tactical victories give an impression of achievement & make good TV. Failure to link tactics to strategy (Op Level)
 - `Attritional` mindsets
 - Lack of time, esp. in Western societies/cultures, for study, reflection & education

How should we go about this?

- As a counter-insurgency. Gray: `Counter-terrorism against al Qaeda should be approached as global counter-insurgency`. Exposing the inadequacies of a counter-terrorist campaign; dropping `GWOT` a good move.
- Recognising (& emphasising) the intellectual/psychological dimension; battlefield is the mind.
- Largely, a war of ideas; fighting (& winning) the battle for legitimacy, and maintaining the moral high ground/moral authority. James Kievas: `The onus is on the state to prove they are morally superior.`
- Applying a comprehensive approach: all lines of operation, all levers of power/influence. Galula: `the final defeat of the insurgency...is not an addition but a multiplication of these various operations; they are all essential and if one is nil, the product will be zero.`
- Building international consensus, for both policy and strategy.
- Leadership. National and international; encouraging/ supporting international leadership; different – whose leadership? US position. UN greater role/responsibility.
- Stabilisation of unstable states. Prevention of failing states. Governance, anti-corruption, de-radicalisation.
- Greater emphasis on learning how to conduct such a COIN
 - Comprehensive approach – learning together.
 - Learning lessons; greater understanding of; militaries slow to learn.
 - Pooling lessons learnt. NATO ACT Lesson Learned Cell, but...
 - Some cause for some optimism eg US COIN doctrine and implementation.
 - But militaries need to recognize the role of education, as well as training (and doctrine). Challenges.
- Howard: `Greatest danger is losing sight of the very values one is fighting for`; Nietzsche: `Who fights a dragon shall himself become a dragon`
- Be prepared for the long haul. Cordesman: `The image of a quick and decisive victory is almost always an illusion`.

Summary

- Not terrorism, but insurgency: complex, hybrid, transnational insurgency. Terrorism but one of the insurgents` tools.
- GWOT, if taken literally, misunderstands the nature of what we face. Counter-productive, liable to exacerbate; risks forfeiting the ethical, moral, legal norms of a civilised society.
- Need to treat insurgency as insurgency; emphasising psychological and intellectual dimensions; the need for a comprehensive approach and international consensus; leadership required and the need for it to be supported; focus on governance and failing/failed states; need to learn better and more systemically.

End