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B. H. LIDDELL HART:
THE STRATEGY OF THE INDIRECT APPROACH
AND THE COUNTER-NARCOTICS CAMPAIGN

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Narcotics is the most dangerous current threat to national security. Oddly enough, and despite forty-five years of cold war contingency planning, it is also probably the most clearly defined threat -- and one which lends itself to "classical" campaign planning. In comparison with either the threat of general war with the Soviets or a major economic crisis involving the deficit and international debt situation, the narcotics threat is both less hypothetical and more imminent.

Why is the narcotics threat so clearly defined?

Because we know the narcotics cartels' general strategic objectives.

Because we can identify the areas supporting the vital facilities and crops.

Because, in many cases, we know the identities of principal leaders and lieutenants - and their habits.

Because we have experience with the various tactics and methods which the cartels employ to market their product as well as subvert civil, military, and moral authority.

And because we can discern the outlines of the political and social framework within which our efforts to eliminate the threat must be mounted.

We also have evaluated our own "friendly" situation. We have a national "Czar" whose Office of the National Drug Control Policy has largely identified (and in some cases marshalled) the various resources necessary to waging a long and bitter campaign. Equally, we appear to have decided that the "center of gravity" is the demand side, with supply an important but lesser strategic objective.

In addition to these key decisions on basic organization and objectives, we appear near a working consensus in four other critical areas affecting the strength of our effort.

First, our commitment will have to be one for the long-haul. In fact, that commitment will probably extend for a longer time than that of any single war (much less campaign) in our history.

Second, we will have to accept that striking effective blows against the narcotics traffickers will at some point draw retaliation against not only the law enforcement and military personnel engaged in counter-narcotic operations, but also against our senior civil, military, and national political leadership (as well as their families).

The third area of attention is the role of the media. Here, we will have to accept that progress in this "war" is likely to be measured by new yardsticks which are both more subtle and less adaptable to graphic presentation than were either "body counts," "villages pacified," or "kilometers advanced."

The final area is political. A consensus appears to be emerging that the necessary reduction in the narcotics threat must not be achieved at the expense of key national political values or the sacrifice of essential civil liberties. This still-forming consensus is also the initial basis for the "rules of engagement" which will increasingly dictate the nature of counter-narcotics actions within the United States.

But, despite a wealth of specific knowledge on the threat and an emerging unity in key public attitudes, a strategic design is still missing. B. H. Liddell Hart's "indirect approach" is one which offers to effectively meld the disparate elements into a national counter-narcotic strategy.

"Furthermore, while the horizon of grand strategy is bounded by the war, grand strategy looks beyond the war to the subsequent peace. It should not only combine the various instruments, but so regulate their use as to avoid damage to the future state of peace - for its security and prosperity."
Strategy, page 336

"Strategy depends for success, first and most, on a sound calculation and coordination of the end and the means. The end must be proportioned to the total means, and the means used in gaining each intermediate end...must

be proportioned to the value and needs of that end - whether it be to gain an objective or to fulfill a contributory purpose. An excess may be as harmful as a deficiency."
Strategy, page 336

The content of these two quotes suggests that, as we develop our strategy, we should consider the future form of three sets of relationships: the individual American and his civil rights; the federal framework linking state and central government; and, the web of future relationships between Washington and those countries involved in the counter-narcotics campaign -- particularly friendly Latin American and Asian states serving as unwilling hosts to cartel operations. A victory at the complete expense of any of these relationships may be no victory at all. The quotes also emphasize the importance of agreement between ends and means, while at the same time highlighting Liddell Hart's parallel concern with eventual versus immediate results.

"...destruction (of the enemy force) may not be essential for a decision, and for fulfillment of the war aim. In the case of a state that is seeking not conquest but the maintenance of its security, the aim is fulfilled if the threat be removed - if the enemy is led to abandon his purpose."
Strategy, page 338

These words suggest that the complete elimination of narcotics trafficking isn't a realistic objective for the supply part of the "war." Instead it suggests that removing the threat posed by organized narcotics operations exporting and distributing in quantity may be more appropriate and attainable. More importantly (and indirectly), it suggests that reducing demand is a more permanent means of ensuring national security. Implicitly then, we should consider accepting some low level of narcotics trafficking within our borders even after completion of a successful campaign.

"(the strategist's)...true aim is not so much to seek battles as to seek a strategic situation so advantageous that if it does not of itself produce the decision, its continuation by a battle is sure to achieve this. In other words, dislocation is the aim of strategy; its sequel may be either the enemy's dissolution or his easier disruption in battle.
Strategy, page 339

In short, Liddell Hart would suggest that we seek to create situations overseas in which actions by friendly host nations themselves cause dislocation to cartel operations. At least initially, such situations, in which we might well take an active and complementary role, are usually preferable to unilateral actions on our part which might well harden resistance rather than achieve the desired dislocation of drug operations. In a more concrete vein, and pursuing the indirect approach, both a growing European concern with narcotics penetration and the onerous debt owed U.S. banks by many Latin American and Asian nations may offer a part of the leverage needed to create situations in the host nations leading to the desired dislocation.

In the case of the demand side, actions such as legalization of random drug testing by employers would indirectly enlist thousands of new "soldiers" in our ranks, and at the same time begin to dislocate the cartels' supporting supply and sales networks within our borders.

"The move around the enemy's front against his rear...takes the line of least resistance is the line of least expectation. They are the two faces of the same coin...for if we merely take the line of least resistance, its obviousness will appeal to the opponent also; and this line may no longer be that of least resistance...

In studying the physical aspect we must never lose sight of the psychological, and only when both are combined is the strategy truly an indirect approach, calculated to dislocate the opponent's balance...

...it is usually necessary for the dislocating move to be preceded by a move or moves, which can best be described by the term "distract" in its literal sense of "to draw asunder." The purpose of this distraction is to deprive the enemy of his freedom of action, and it should operate in both the physical and psychological spheres. In the physical, it should cause a distortion of his forces or their diversion to unprofitable ends...so that they cannot interfere with one's own decisively intended move. In the psychological sphere, the same effect is sought by playing upon the fears of, and by deceiving, the opposing command...to mystify and to mislead causes distraction, while surprise is the essential cause of dislocation. It is through the distraction of the commander's mind that the distraction of his forces follows. The loss of his freedom of action is the sequel to the loss of his freedom of conception." Strategy, page 341

Clearly Liddell Hart's message for a counter-narcotics strategy is to continually distract, dislocate, and strike at traffickers by paralyzing their judgement and perspective through a constantly re-adjusted package of actions in both the psychological and physical realms. In addition to feeding a constant stream of advice, materiel assistance, training, and intelligence support to cooperative regimes, we might well consider less obvious moves such as establishing rival "STING" operations in Latin America and Asia to destabilize the situation, begin price wars, and sow dissension. Collateral actions might include simultaneous announcement by the United

States, European, and Latin American governments of high bounties on the heads of selected drug lords.

In any case, the requirement is a combination of coordinated and complementary actions which would divert drug organization resources, play on innate fears of betrayal and mistrust, strike in supposedly safe and protected areas, and simultaneously move against demand through fears of loss of employment and related initiatives. Such a combination would be both indirect and effective.

"...to ensure reaching an objective one should have alternate objectives... For if the enemy is certain as to your point of aim, he has the best possible chance of guarding himself - and blunting your weapon. If, on the other hand, you take a line that threatens alternative objectives, you distract his mind and forces."
Strategy, page 343

The suggestion of a series of alternative objectives on a single line of advance applies to efforts against demand as well as supply. Clearly, the concept stems directly from Liddell Hart's advocacy of "distract and dislocate." A well considered counter-narcotic strategy embodying the indirect approach then would also provide for a concept (or concepts) of execution in which multiple objectives were continually placed at risk so that even if the primary objective resists achievement at the desired moment, others are achievable. In short, we should try to economize on commitment of scarce resources while maintaining the narcotics leadership on the horns of a continuous and confusing dilemma.

"Moreover, fighting power is but one of the instruments of grand strategy - which should take account of and apply the power of financial pressure, of diplomatic pressure, of commercial pressure, and, not least of ethical pressure, to weaken the opponent's will."
Strategy, page 336

"The essential truth underlying these maxims is that for success two major problems must be solved - dislocation and exploitation. One precedes and one follows the actual blow...you cannot hit the enemy with effect unless you have first created the opportunity; you cannot make the effect decisive unless you exploit the second opportunity that comes before he can recover."

Strategy, page 349

The task is to develop a strategy that reflects the breadth of resources envisioned by Liddell Hart and at the same time is characterized by a cycle of dislocation and exploitation on the two central axis of supply and demand. The intricacies of the counter-narcotic effort, the very high national security stake involved, and the nature of the enemy and his facilities all demand an indirect strategy constantly adjusted to a fluid situation.