

Intervention, Stabilization, and Transformation Operations: The Role of Landpower in the New Strategic Environment

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A historic shift has taken place in the strategic environment as globalization and interconnectedness propel the concept of security in new, unforeseen directions. Sovereignty is no longer sacrosanct; security is no longer purely national. Now what takes place within states is of intense concern to those outside them. This shatters long-standing historical patterns in which even horrific internal conflicts were usually contained. In the past, great civil wars in America, Russia, and China, as well as dozens of smaller ones, raged with minimal outside intervention.¹ External powers sometimes meddled in internal wars, but could and often did resist.

Today, interconnectedness between states, their permeability, the globalization of economies, the transparency arising from information technology, and the intermixing of people around the world give every conflict regional and global repercussions.² “In an increasingly interconnected world,” states the *National Security Strategy of the United States*, “regional crisis can strain our alliances, rekindle rivalries among the major powers, and create horrifying affronts to human dignity.”³ Internal conflicts create refugee flows which destabilize neighboring states. They often spawn organized crime as rebels turn to smuggling to raise capital and acquire weaponry. As the images of internal war are broadcast or emailed around the world, awareness rises and, with it, demands for action or intervention—the days are gone when tens of millions could die in civil wars with barely a whisper to the outside. And internal conflicts and the weak states or ungoverned areas they create often

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serve as breeding grounds for terrorism.⁴ What this means is that internal conflict or intense repression is now the common concern of the world community. Security is holistic rather than atomized.

American strategy is still adjusting to this new reality. In the decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton relied on international organizations, particularly the United Nations, and multinational coalitions to restore order in failed states or those facing internal conflict. Outside of the Western Hemisphere, the United States was unwilling to intervene in an internal conflict or even play a dominant role without UN approval and multinational support. But after the attacks of 11 September 2001, the United States recognized that internal conflicts and the persistence of radical regimes which waged proxy conflict via terrorism were simply too dangerous to ignore.

In this new strategic environment, instability and indirect aggression must be ameliorated, not simply contained. If the root cause of instability or proxy aggression is not addressed, the thinking goes, the problem will eventually reemerge. In discussing the Middle East, for instance, President George W. Bush stated, “As long as that region is a place of tyranny and despair and anger, it will produce men and movements that threaten the safety of Americans and our friends. We seek the advance of democracy for the most practical of reasons: because democracies do not support terrorists or threaten the world with weapons of mass murder.”⁵ Aggression flowing from internal instability thus demands the actual transformation of an unstable or aggressive state into one which is both stable and willing to adhere to the norms of the international community. This is a revolutionary idea.

Landpower is crucial for this new grand strategy since it is the tool by which aggressive or conflict-ridden states can be transformed into stable ones. What is now needed are strategic concepts to implement the larger vision and to provide a basis for force, leader, and operational concept development. Existing strategic and operational concepts—major theater war, rapid decisive operations, peace support operations, counterinsurgency operations, and so forth—provide part of the solution. But these need to be revised, woven together, and tied to the broader interagency and multinational requirements in new ways. In the new strategic environment, the primary function of the Amer-

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ican military is what might be called Intervention, Stabilization, and Transformation (IST) operations which do exactly that—integrate the disparate strands of existing military strategy. The next step in the evolution of US military strategy is to refine and develop this idea.

The World Becomes a Nail

There is an old saying that when all you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. In both Afghanistan and Iraq, the US military faced IST missions (even though the phrase itself was not used in official publications), but was maximized for intervention. The assumptions of the previous decade—that someone else, whether a multinational force or some other element of the government—would assume responsibility for the stabilization and transformation did not hold. In both cases, the US military adapted as best it could. But to do it this way—to undertake IST with a military not properly configured—led to significant inefficiencies and risks.

The US intervention in Afghanistan is a perfect example. Given the meager staging areas and long lines of communication, the United States rejected the traditional approach in which invasion followed a lengthy buildup. The Northern Alliance, buttressed by coalition Special Forces and US airpower, was sufficient to vanquish the Taliban and its allies rather handily. As Stephen Biddle notes, the intervention was “a surprisingly orthodox air-ground theater campaign in which heavy fire support decided a contest between two land armies [T]he key to success in both Afghanistan and traditional joint warfare was the close interaction of fire and maneuver.”⁶

Stabilization and transformation proved much more difficult. The coalition’s stabilization effort reflected an institutional approach. That is, the creation of institutions would lead to greater cooperation and hence legitimacy of the central government among Afghans. To launch this enterprise, coalition partners developed the Sector Security Reform (SSR) concept with a lead-nation approach using five pillars: Law Enforcement (Germany), Judiciary (Italy), Counter Narcotics (UK), Afghan National Army (US), and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of the militia forces (Japan).⁷

The US effort to establish the Afghan National Army (ANA) has been largely successful. To create a positive image of military service, the government eschewed conscription in favor of an all-volunteer force of 70,000.⁸ Thus far, ANA units have proven reliable in combat operations with US forces, but initial high attrition rates (averaging 50 percent) as a result of local impressments, low pay, and the rigors of military discipline plagued the ANA.⁹ Consequent focus on these issues appears to have stabilized the problem of attrition. More problematic, Afghan warlord weapon and equipment donations to the ANA were scant, inoperable, and incomplete; the warlords preferred to retain

the best equipment for their own militias.¹⁰ The importance of the ANA is not confined solely to the warfighting arena. Afghans need to regard it as the primary security provider (vice the militias), and view it with a sense of pride. The legitimacy of the central government hinges on the success of the ANA as an institution, and hence the ANA must become involved in projects (e.g., provincial reconstruction teams) which enhance its image and by extension the government's image.

Despite a great deal of innovation and progress, the transformation of the Afghan security system is far from complete. The entrenched warlords and the reemergence of drug trafficking have presented serious obstacles, while the al Qaeda-based insurgency prevents economic development and stability outside the major cities. During 2004, US leaders in Afghanistan began a search for more effective methods. In February of that year Lieutenant General David Barno, commander of US forces in Afghanistan, announced that he would begin basing US troops in Afghan villages—in an effort to yield tactical and intelligence benefits—but the plan has not been fully implemented.¹¹ The plan calls for the establishment of 15 provincial reconstruction teams (PRT) and is a positive development that is likely to reap significant benefits.¹² The deployment of the 25th Infantry Division in the spring of 2004 added new energy to American efforts by keeping the militants off balance while Sector Security Reform progresses. Overall, the trends in Afghanistan are positive and reflect a balanced approach to transforming Afghanistan into a functioning state.

Similarly, the intervention in Iraq went very well from a military perspective but was significantly less successful once the initial combat abated. In many ways, the planning for stabilization and transformation seemed ad hoc, almost an afterthought compared to the meticulous planning for the intervention itself.¹³ American planners appear to have underestimated the degree of instability that emerged when the old system collapsed.¹⁴ They expected many Iraqi military and police units to remain intact and switch loyalties, but none did.¹⁵ As a result, the United States did not have adequate forces on hand to deal with the massive looting and instability. The units present were exhausted after weeks of sustained combat. They were short of military police, intelligence units, engineers, civil affairs, light infantry, and other badly needed assets.¹⁶ Coordination with other US government agencies also left much to be desired. The Department of Defense created the Organization for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Affairs (ORHA), which later became the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), to synchronize and coordinate the various components of stabilization and reconstruction. But this organization was understaffed, inadequately prepared, late to organize, and slow to deploy. The interface between the US military and the CPA re-

mained a persistent problem, with each grumbling that the other should be doing significantly more to enhance stabilization.¹⁷

Whether these failures of planning and coordination caused the destabilization of Iraq or simply exacerbated it, American efforts were clearly not effective in rapidly restoring stability and jump-starting transformation. The economy has remained stagnant for months, fueling anger and resentment. Basic services have not been restored for an extended period with persistent shortages of fuel and electricity. Iraqis quickly began to lose patience with what they viewed as the heavy-handed and culturally insensitive nature of the American occupation. By the beginning of the summer, an insurgency emerged, initially led by former regime loyalists but later spreading, particularly among Iraq's Sunni tribes, who saw their traditional dominance slipping away. Eventually it became clear that the insurgency was composed of four factions, to some degree interlinked, to some degree competing: the tribal-based nationalist insurgency in the Sunni-dominated region north and northwest of Baghdad, with its vortex in Fallujah; the Sunni insurgent groups controlled by former military and security officials of the Hussein regime; the foreign jihadists; and the Shi'ite uprising lead by the radical Shi'ite cleric Moktada al-Sadr.

Throughout the summer and into the autumn, the insurgents in the Sunni Triangle developed increasingly sophisticated methods for attacking coalition forces using improvised explosive devices (IEDs), rocket-propelled grenades, rockets, small arms, and mortars. Foreign jihadists undertook a parallel campaign of suicide bombings aimed at disrupting the stabilization process. In April the insurgency reached a new peak of violence as US forces entered Fallujah to attempt a clearing and stabilization operation while, at nearly the same time, al-Sadr led an insurrection across southern Iraq. Fallujah reflected a shift from "shoot and scoot" attacks to set-piece small-unit actions—what one military officer called "a stand-up fight between two military forces."¹⁸ For the first time, the insurgents attempted to create and hold "liberated areas."¹⁹ Particularly troubling was the apparent coordination, even alliance, between the Sunni and Shia rebels.²⁰ The spring 2004 battles also showed that the new Iraqi security forces, which were a cornerstone of the US efforts to transform the nation, were far from ready to defend their nation. About half of the Iraqi forces, particularly the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps which was to bear the brunt of the counterinsurgency effort, stood and fought.²¹ Unfortunately, the United States did not have any alternative plans other than to start over and try to reconstitute the Iraqi forces that had failed, writing new orders to shift the focus of the American military mission from offensive combat operations to protecting the new Iraqi government and economy while Iraq's security forces matured.²²

The April battle for Fallujah seemed to represent a turning point in the insurgency both militarily and psychologically, galvanizing opposition to the

United States both within Iraq and across the Islamic world. Eventually, US commanders decided that the political and psychological costs of capturing the city would outweigh the military gains and called off the offensive. While the city was ostensibly to be controlled by the “Fallujah Brigade” of Iraqi security forces, in reality it became a major guerrilla base used to plan and launch insurgent attacks.²³ By the summer, it was fully controlled by an array of resistance groups which coordinated their actions through a Council of Mujahideen. The insurgents were not expelled until November. While Iraqi security forces were gradually replacing the American military in counterinsurgency operations, there was little sign that the insurgents were nearing defeat. And questions remained about the ability of Iraqi security forces to defeat the insurgents with a diminished US role.

Throughout the first 18 months of operations in Iraq, the US military showed great proficiency at intervention, demolishing Hussein’s military with unexpected swiftness. Later the American military—like the rest of the US government—showed innovation and determination as it faced the challenges of stabilization and transformation, but unfortunately it was not maximized for success. The same held true in Afghanistan. The “recent campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq,” as Antulio Echevarria notes, “are examples of remarkable military victories. However, those victories have not yet culminated in strategic successes. . . . The new American way of war appears to have misidentified the center of gravity in each of these campaigns, placing more emphasis on destroying enemy forces than securing population centers and critical infrastructure and maintaining order.”²⁴ The development of effective IST capabilities could remedy this situation.

Framework

Improved capabilities begin with conceptual clarity. IST operations are the means for projecting American power against a source of instability or proxy aggression, quickly stabilizing the nation or region where the intervention takes place, but then undertaking the often long and arduous process of transforming the unstable or aggressive state into a stable entity adhering to the norms of the international community. IST operations, in other words, seek to ameliorate a problem rather than just deferring or containing it. A working definition of IST operations would be: Intervention, Stabilization, and Transformation operations are a sustained and integrated interagency (often multinational) activity to project power to an ungoverned area, failed state, state-in-conflict, or chronic aggressor state, to quickly restore order, and then to ameliorate the source of instability or aggression by transforming that state into a stable, progressive member of the international community.

IST operations must reflect the seamless integration of all elements of national power. There is simply no other way that transformation can occur. This integration should occur not only on the vertical dimension of an IST operation—from before intervention to final transformation—but also on the horizontal (integrating the agencies, nations, and organizations involved). The need to mesh with a wide range of partners, from coalition militaries to elements of the US government to international and nongovernmental relief organizations, places new, complex demands on the US military. Great strides have taken place in the past two decades in the arena of jointness to the point that the services are pursuing true interdependence.²⁵ To attain maximum effectiveness at IST operations, a parallel process needs to take place allowing the US military to operate seamlessly with other partners.

Planning for IST operations must also be holistic. Still, the three functions—intervention, stabilization, and transformation—each require a different configuration and skill set from the US military. The skills and organization needed for intervention are largely resident in the current force and likely to be even more evident in the future, transformed force as the Army augments its expeditionary and joint mindset.²⁶ Global strategic speed, information superiority, and the ability to undertake rapid decisive operations are all key. For stabilization, the requirements shift in part because the psychological tasks necessary for the mission become significantly more complex. To succeed at intervention, US forces need only to cause enough fear in their enemies to end resistance. During stabilization, potential opponents must be deterred or dissuaded, supporters need to be reassured, “fence sitters” won over, and external actors convinced to support the effort (or at least not interfere). Such a complex array of psychological objectives can be attained only by a force capable of providing a large-scale, extended, culturally- and politically-sensitive presence, and which builds campaigns around desired psychological effects. In some cases, the US presence may be nonantagonistic and reassuring, but the threat of a quick, forceful reaction must always be present. In other words, the most successful stabilization force is one that wears both the mailed gauntlet and the velvet glove. In addition, the military should work more closely with nonmilitary organizations, both governmental and nongovernmental, during stabilization. The further IST operations proceed, the more important that nonkinetic realms—the psychological—become. Success at IST operations requires both proficiency and an integration of nonkinetic efforts with nonmilitary partners.

Even though transformation may be the most important dimension of IST operations and the ultimate guarantor of strategic success, the direct role for the US military is at its lowest. Creating an indigenous security force that is both effective and professional is key; it is here that contractors can make a

valuable contribution to the effort. The US military's major function remains continued oversight and direction and, of course, provision of security.

Developing IST Capabilities

Given the vital role of IST operations in the emerging American grand strategy, the US military and the government as a whole will have to undergo a broad program of capability development. Since IST operations are landpower-based, the Army would be the primary locomotive. These developments need to be focused on five areas.

- *Concepts.* IST operations require a different set of strategic and operational concepts than warfighting. Based on experience in Afghanistan and Iraq, some of these needs are already clear. The US military, for instance, needs a stabilization concept that is equivalent to rapid decisive operations in conventional warfighting. This concept needs to be solidly grounded in mass psychology, with the full integration of cultural distinctions. It should identify the type and phasing of military activities most likely to restore stability under specific conditions. A concept for rapidly recreating the security forces of a collapsed or transforming state is also needed. Among other things, this should identify procedures and priorities. And a new counterinsurgency concept is required to replace the current Cold War-era one, a concept that takes into account protracted opposition. The Army has published a new counterinsurgency doctrine, but this treats 20th-century, Maoist-style insurgency as a universal model, thus limiting its utility.²⁷ Only conceptual creativity, a robust slate of experimentation and wargaming, and assessments of ongoing operations can produce a full palette of conceptual needs. Once this is created, Joint Forces Command and the services can undertake the actual process of concept development, testing, and refinement.

- *Leader Development, Education, and Training.* As concepts and lessons emerge, IST operations need to be fully integrated into the military's program of leader development, education, and training. But because IST operations are, in their essence, interagency (and usually multinational), this process cannot be limited to the military. Greater steps must be taken to incorporate nonmilitary and non-US partners into US military leader development, professional military education, and training procedures, and to incorporate US military leaders into those of other government agencies and America's partners.

- *Planning Procedures.* Planning should include both strategic and operational dimensions. Strategic planning is required to identify potential areas for intervention, stabilization, and transformation. IST planning cannot be solely military, but the military, because of its greater capacity for deliber-

ate planning, could and should be the lead agency. Both strategic and operational planning needs to make extensive use of regional and cultural experts, émigrés, cultural psychologists, individuals with expertise in economic development and mass communications, and other nontraditional advisors. These experts should be linked to planning staffs through virtual means if they are not resident in the organization or agency.

- *Reorganization.* Three types of reorganization would be most important for augmenting effective IST operations. The most fundamental would be reorganization of the military. Current discussions focus on adding more units that are particularly valuable during stabilization—Civil Affairs, Military Police, and so forth. While this is a commendable idea, it would not be enough to assure full effectiveness during IST operations. One of the defining features of this type of activity is its duality. To be fully effective, the US military needs to have units that are imbued with the warfighter ethos, capable of striking fear into the heart of an enemy and undertaking rapid decisive operations, as well as ones that can use the “velvet glove” to reassure, placate, and coordinate with civilian officials. The question is whether one force is capable of executing all of these missions.

Some analysts feel that it will take two separate forces to maximize efficiency in these two distinct realms.²⁸ On the other hand, the British military has had limited success with using the same units for both warfighting and peacekeeping. As a general rule, if the Army can afford tailored units for IST operations, the level of effectiveness would be higher than demanding that warfighters become peacekeepers and vice versa. The deciding factor in all likelihood will be the threat of large-scale conventional land war. If such a threat is low, the United States can afford the dual orientation. If it is high, demanding that warfighters assume the additional role of peacekeepers may be the only feasible option. In either case, modularity will allow for the tailoring of Army forces to match the tasks at hand.

A second level of reorganization would be the creation of a permanent structure similar to the Coalition Provisional Authority with the capability to coordinate and oversee IST operations. This organization could be under the guidance of the Department of Defense (as was the case with the CPA), the Department of State, or another department, but it is critical that some high-profile organization with authority across agencies be in charge. In fact, the State Department is moving in this direction. In July 2004 it created the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization to lead, coordinate, and institutionalize the US government’s civilian capacity to prevent or prepare for post-conflict situations.²⁹ This office is staffed with professionals from across the government and is designed to develop civilian capabilities in the reconstruction and stabilization arena similar to those of the military.

Third, the United States needs to develop a professional cadre of IST experts outside the military, perhaps attached to the new CPA-like organization. This cadre should include regional specialists as well as those versed in counterinsurgency, strategic planning, cultural psychology and communications, democratization, legal reform, economic development, intelligence, infrastructure revival, and the other array of skills needed for the successful transformation of a post-conflict state. This corps should have its own career track and professional development programs.

- *Capability Enhancement.* Following this reorganization, the US government would have the ability to augment capabilities vital for IST operations. One such capability is information and psychological operations. While existing Psychological Operations Forces have impressive skills, they are primarily designed to support warfighting commanders. Information and psychological activities are a major operational axis in IST, not a supporting one. This enhancement requires innovation. For instance, winning wars of ideas requires the sophisticated crafting of media reaching into a target society. A standing information operations directorate composed of both military and civilian members would assure the information campaign is staffed, funded, and resourced for the tasks at hand. The media section, comprising radio and television, needs to maintain a cadre staff to solicit indigenous entertainers (playwrights, musicians, composers, and singers) and journalists. These staff members would bring the cultural, linguistic, and political expertise required for a successful information and psychological campaign. Their programs would weave entertainment with information for a maximized effect. News shows would be designed to counter adversarial propaganda and conspiracy theories by addressing accusations immediately and inviting guests to debate relevant issues.

Another important capability that must be augmented is the ability to rapidly rebuild (or, in some cases, build) the security forces of a state undergoing stabilization and transformation. This would be done through the creation of a series of security force generation centers located in key regions. These centers would be multinational facilities specifically designed to undertake the rapid training, education, and professional development of the security forces of a post-conflict state, including the military, gendarmerie or civil guard, police, intelligence services, national security civil servants, and judiciary. These centers would have a small permanent staff, an inventory of basic supplies, and prepared training regimens and educational curricula. As a crisis emerged, the centers could be augmented with personnel, including regional experts from concerned nations. Ultimately the center would serve as a “one-stop shop” and coordinator for donors willing to contribute expertise, equipment, and other resources required for security. The objective would be to avoid the long delays and inefficiencies that arise from current ad hoc procedures.

Finally, the US military needs to enhance its ability to operate in culturally and linguistically alien environments. The type of cultural and linguistic skills currently resident in Special Forces should become the norm in a wider array of units. To assist with this, consideration might be given to earmarking Army units to specific regions, at least for the purposes of cultural and linguistic training. (These units could be used outside their designated region in a warfighting emergency.)

Conclusions

If the United States cannot effectively intervene, stabilize, and transform states-in-conflict and repressive states, the coming decades will be a time of increasing danger, with the potential for yet unrealized disaster. The grand strategy to meet such threats is taking shape; now a military strategy and tangible capabilities for implementation are required. The building blocks exist within the US military, but these are just a start. The military, especially the Army, should augment its own capabilities and lead government-wide efforts. Even if the Army undertakes a full and successful transformation focused on IST operations, the rest of the government has to follow suit if the United States is to implement a new grand strategy. The Army therefore needs to serve as a catalyst for greater change.

The time is past when the decisive application of landpower meant simply defeating enemies on the battlefield. Today it entails transforming them into nonbelligerents, allies, and friends. This is an extraordinarily complex task which will pose some of the greatest organizational and conceptual challenges the Army has ever faced. But given the immense costs associated with failure to act, no effort can be spared.

NOTES

1. Thirty million people reportedly were killed in China's Taiping Rebellion (1851-64). Estimates of the death toll in the Russian Civil War (1917-1922) range from 800,000 to 8,000,000. The Chinese Civil War (1945-49) caused somewhere between 1,000,000 and 6,000,000 military and civilian deaths. There were between 550,000 and 620,000 deaths from battle, disease, and accident in the American Civil War.

2. The effect that interconnectedness and globalization have on the strategic environment is explored in detail in Steven Metz, *Armed Conflict in the 21st Century: The Information Revolution and Post-Modern Warfare* (Carlisle, Pa.: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2000), pp. 5-25, <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/ssi/pdffiles/PUB226.pdf>.

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26. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-12.
27. See Keith J. Costa, "Army Crafting Field Manual for Counterinsurgency Operations," *Inside The Pentagon*, 26 August 2004, p. 1.
28. For instance, Thomas P. M. Barnett writes, "In the end, 9/11 is going to consummate a split that has been building within the US military since the end of the Cold War: between the 'big stick' warrior force and the 'baton stick' constabulary force" (*The Pentagon's New Map* [New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2004], p. 283).
29. US Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, slide show presented at the CSIS-Woodrow Wilson Center event, Washington, D.C., 20 October 2004, <http://www.state.gov/s/crs/rls/>.