

Strategy, Cost, Risk: The Economic Imperative or the Security Imperative?

Foremost on the minds of most Americans is the state of the economy and the budget deficit; with a mandated “super committee” expected to cut expenditures by more than 1 trillion dollars above current cuts.

Decisions by congress will have reaching impact for years, if not for decades to come. As US domestic issues take center stage in the run up to the November elections, Congress and the US Administration must still focus on its National Defense Strategy.

What kind of defense are we willing to fund, especially in light of seemingly new revelations of the Pentagon’s inability to account for billions of dollars? How much risk are we willing to take, and where should, or, could that risk be accepted? These constraints will drive the formulation and execution of strategy. What will be the operational and strategic consequences of the constraints?

Should the US continue its global engagements? What kind, and how to prioritize? Will the Department of Defense continue to have the ability to execute this strategy?

Let’s explore a couple of key decisions that impact strategy, budgets, and engagements.

In 1997, in recognition of the complexity of post conflict and stability operations, and to avoid repeating the mistakes made in Bosnia, Somalia, and Haiti, President Bill Clinton issued Presidential Decision Directive 56 (PDD 56). This PDD called for establishing a unified strategy and training for the whole of government, collecting lessons learned from operations, and integrating these lessons into training and planning.

PDD 56 used the term *complex contingency operations* and called for U.S.Government agencies to institutionalize lessons and develop and conduct interagency training programs.

On December 7, 2005, President George W. Bush issued National Security Presidential Directive 44 (NSPD 44). Although not explicitly building upon PDD 56, NSPD 44 took the approach a step further, *calling for a permanent structure for stability operations that would fall under civilian leadership, and in coordination with the military.*

NSPD 44 established as a policy imperative “improved coordination, planning, and implementation for reconstruction and stabilization assistance for foreign states and regions at risk of, in, or in transition from conflict or civil strife.” Several tasks and processes are outlined in the directive, including the development of improved and coordinated strategies, programming, and foreign assistance funding within and among the agencies; establishing a civilian surge response capability; and identifying lessons learned to inform improvements in operations.

NSPD 44 also established a way for the National Security Council to oversee agency collaboration to seek to resolve policy issues and decide on actions to be taken.

DOD Directive 3000.05 of November 28, 2005, raised stability operations to the level of a core military capability that “shall be given priority comparable to combat operations.” It was developed concurrently with NSPD 44, mirrors the civilian-military coordinating provisions, and mandates that DOD and the military Services coordinate with the State Department.

The revised and updated DOD Instruction 3000.05 of September 2009, which supersedes the 2005 directive, makes explicit that the mandate for lessons learned is to serve not only the military, but also civilian agencies.

With these challenges in mind, Congress mandated in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2009 the establishment of a whole-of government reconstruction and stabilization strategy, to include lessons learned. It called for the development of a database on previous reconstruction and stabilization operations and the establishment of a Center for Complex Operations, whose mandate is “to conduct research, collect, analyze, and distribute lessons learned; and compile best practices.”

By now you probably begin to feel a little weak as you realize the gravity and depth of the potential issues.

So how can the US continue its global engagements differently? Wasn't the basic premise, post WW II, for an international collective and economic security arrangement that would prevent the kinds of conflicts we saw in the first half of the 20th century?

Many would argue that budget cuts now impact not just job growth, but industrial growth related to maintaining the military industrial complex, and once this base disappears it is next to impossible to mobilize in the event of a “real threat”¹

What I find discomfiting in the most recent attempts to influence National Security Policy and National Military Strategy is that there is no introspection on changing learning concepts, required skill sets and the overlap in these requirements. One of the reasons that the military appears to have fared so badly the last ten years is that the soft skills of economics, reconstruction, development, and conflict negotiation are not skill sets that are trained, yet have been a requirement since the issuance of NSPD 44.

These are huge soft skill requirements, akin to “consulting for a Big 4”, that require years to acquire and cost hard dollars that have to be in the budget. How do we sustain what has been created? By a broad series of individual self-help projects that leave the professional development too personal study? Lastly, I don't see where the Department of Defense has pursued relationships with civilian business or educational institutions to develop and broaden its needed intellectual capital. It has traditionally seemed to rely on the National Guard and Reserve, but not really, and that is a rant for a different day.

In conclusion, the risk and cost is not just about the hard dollars in budget cuts. We are already 11 years into the 21st Century and this is a grand opportunity to rethink entire organizations, global strategy and capabilities, grow soft power capabilities and repair the image of a Superpower gone rogue.

¹ See Hard Choices, Responsible Defense in an Age of Uncertainty, Center for New American Security, Oct 2011, LTG David W. Barno, USA (Ret), Nora Bensahel, Travis Sharp

The author of this Op-Ed, Terry Tucker is a member of the Editorial Board of Read-Online.Org, a Senior Military Analyst for Yorktown Systems Group and a Professor of History at Brandman University.

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