



CENTER FOR NATIONAL POLICY

“THE FUTURE OF STABILITY OPERATIONS: LESSONS LEARNED FROM IRAQ”

FEATURED SPEAKER:

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MR. TIM ROEMER: (In progress) – what is the world going to look like and does a president evaluate and articulate a foreign policy for the United States for the 21st century. We've also engaged in a brand new series called The Defense Transformation Series, where we're looking at the eight to 10 key questions for the secretary of defense. What are the answers to those eight or 10 key questions to set up our defense posture going forward?

I can't think of a better person who bridges those two issues, who has got great experience, both on Capitol Hill and throughout the executive branch, to answer some of those defense questions and those foreign policy questions potentially for the next president of the United States.

In kind of setting this, as I get ready to introduce Tony, Will Rogers had a great saying. He used to say, "You know, you could be on the right track, but if you're not heading down that track fast enough, you're still going to get run over." The question for us today is Tony talks about stability operations and the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan is are we going down the right track in these two strategically critical areas and are we moving fast enough, both in terms of solving the problems in these two areas, but also we're going to have a new administration in the next few months.

What is the transition team going to look like on that new administration to tackle these issues? And how does that administration put the key people in place with the lessons learned here in Iraq and Afghanistan so that they can quickly put policy priorities together to start to solve these very, very vexing questions.

So we think we've got one of the key areas of policy here for Capitol Hill and for the next president. And I know we have one of the key experts to provide the kinds of answers and thinking and analysis that the next president and the next Congress are really going to look to and rely on.

I think you're also going to see, as we have Tony put the slide show up, Stability Operations, you're going to hear some familiar words about the military and the security. You're going to hear some words, like nation-building that were dismissed occasionally and sometimes regularly by this administration. And then you'll also going to hear, I think, some new words and phrases that maybe a new administration is going to look to, like dollars are bullets, media dominance, employ young men, some issues that directly relate to rebuilding in places like Afghanistan and Iraq that are probably key to long-term success.

Tony and I go way, way back to the 1980s actually, where I was working for a Democratic senator from the State of Arizona, and doing defense and trade and foreign policy work. His name was Dennis DeConcini and he was on the Appropriations Committee. And he was working for guy that most of you have never heard of, I'm sure,

another senator from Arizona. His name is John McCain and he's now running for president.

And Tony was very insightful and effective on Capitol Hill way back then, even more insightful and effective because of how he's built his résumé. We're really fortunate to have him. He is now holding the Arleigh Burke Chair at CSIS. He has worked extensively around the world, all over the Middle East, all over Europe. He's worked in the Defense Department, the Energy Department, on the National Security Council. He has been a prolific author with 50 books under his penmanship. One of the best is a four-volume series on the lessons of modern war that you'll probably hear a little bit more about today.

He has also taught at Georgetown University and been a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the Smithsonian Institution.

So we're honored to have Tony. He is a terrific speaker, author, and expert on government. Please extend a very warm and enthusiastic Center for National Policy welcome. (Applause.)

MR. ANTHONY CORDESMAN: Thank you, Tim, and thank you, ladies and gentlemen. I'm not going to read you a PowerPoint, but one of the key problems that all of us face is the sheer level of complexity in what it takes to deal with these issues. There aren't any ways you can simplify. There aren't any top three priorities. You have to deal with entire nations, with their perceptions, their actions, their neighbors and alliances, and you have to do it simultaneously, regardless of whether you have the assets and capabilities. And so what I would like to do is just briefly make a few points.

One, I always used to tell my students, "You're not a superpower if you can't voluntarily intervene in about half the world without getting into more trouble than it's worth." And that is more and more true as economic power shifts, as we see the limits to an all-volunteer force structure, and we've become dependent not on traditional alliances, but on local alliances, which are often contingency based and where the host country is often the critical aspect.

One thing I think we've all learned is it wouldn't have mattered how well we prepared for Afghanistan or Iraq. We still would have faced a major challenge in terms of asymmetric warfare. You're not able, simply because you're the leading conventional power, to suddenly go in and say this makes you able to conduct stability operations and deal with the kinds of regional threats and problems that occur in these countries.

One thing that I think as Americans, we really don't like is uncertainty in the fact history exists. It's a basic principle of U.S. policy that you have to get everything done in two years. It is a basic principle of reality that you don't and frankly, that you can't control large-scale historical forces, which are driven by other cultures and regional pressures.

One other thing that particularly strikes me is if these are long wars, and, in general, I think they will be wars of attrition, wars of time, you're not going to be able to win them unless you can find ways to sustain congressional American and allied support.

So these are really the key points.

The challenge of Afghanistan and Iraq, they're very different countries to some extent. They have one thing in common, which is why I am very, very, I think, leery of the terms we use. Afghanistan was broken in the late '70s. I watched Iraq go bankrupt in 1982 working there. I watched the education system collapse. I watched the economic structure become frozen, and to some extent, implode. These weren't just failed states; they were broken states and they were broken at every level.

If we are to face this kind of challenge, and we've done it before in Vietnam, in Haiti, to a lesser degree in Lebanon, in countries in Africa, we have to understand that whether we can build nations or not it is not a matter of counterinsurgency. It also isn't a matter of stability operations.

Okay, you've defeated the overt conventional (front?). Now the real problem begins. And the failure to accept that again and again has been a critical reason we are often forced to leave or we are sometimes defeated.

Now, strategic and grand strategic lessons – Tim, I'm sure, will put this on the web for you, so I'm not going to focus on it.

Had we honestly assessed the risk of stability operations and nation-building, regardless of our reasons for going to war in Afghanistan or Iraq, would we have done anything like what we did in either country, and would we have assessed the risk in any sense in the way we did? I think the answer is clearly no. It's clearly no because that's the assessment of the U.S. military, because you had to change the field manuals, you had to change the DOD directives, because the assumptions we made were simply flatly wrong. And we have admitted this bureaucratically and in terms of doctrine.

I think that I say here and I emphasize complexity, one great question is this is a wonderful set of checkmarks. Who in the interagency process does that? Can you find or name the group that is capable of actually providing an effective net assessment and risk analysis of what it means to get into this kind of war? The fact is today we can't. We downplayed net assessment. The intelligence community contracts out. The policy community tells itself what it wants to hear, and that, frankly, is not something you quickly or easily change. But if you can't do it honestly, these worst-case wars are extraordinarily difficult.

One basic principle of limited war – we call it limited because it isn't something you have to sustain if the cost benefits go sour on you. But if that happens, you have to have alternative strategies and focus.

Now, let me just say, I've used the term (our?) nation-building not because it's good, but because stability operations in counterinsurgency really aren't applicable. Just think of it. Vietnam, what we did in Central and Latin America, Haiti, what happened in Somalia, what happened in Lebanon, Afghanistan and Iraq are not counterinsurgency and are not stability operations.

We haven't played around with \$122 billion worth of expenditures on aid to Iraq, their money and ours, because it was counterinsurgency or a stability operation. And one point down there that is a consistent lesson, only the host country can really win these wars. If you can't create a stable government, some kind of economic order, a security structure, and have political support from at least a reasonable number of factions and people, (kinetic?) victories don't come. And this isn't my opinion. It is the opinion of the U.S. military. That's what the field manual says. It says it now. It didn't say it before we went into Iraq and Afghanistan.

I've listed here four elements of victory and let me stress something. They're not mine. I talked about complexity and I talked about the need to look beyond the military dimension. This particular chart is one General Petraeus presented to Congress in his most recent testimony. It isn't important that you memorize it. It is important you understand this is an oversimplification of what it takes to fight the Iraq war. And if you look at this chart, there is as much dealing with internal, domestic, political, and ethnic disputes, outside powers, the economy and governance as there is with any dimension of counterinsurgency.

Incidentally, if you thought that chart was a little complex, this is the same chart done by our commanders in Afghanistan. You look at it again. You'll see how much the emphasis goes far beyond the military dimension. And if any of you have had the chance to go out and work in the field, places where the 82nd or 101st are operating in Afghanistan, or get out of the green zone and operate in places like – (unintelligible) – or Fallujah, you have a pretty good understanding of what this really means. This is day-to-day reality. It's not the quarterly report or the weekly State Department report. This is just one look at the problem of part of Afghanistan.

Let me note that in the real world, to actually map stability and counterinsurgency operations, this is done down by the tribal area and sometimes by the Valley. You can't fight this on the basis of nominal national assessments. You really find that this is local. Tip O'Neill is as relevant to counterinsurgency, stability operations, and nation-building as he is to American politics.

One other thing. One of the things I find most striking is the gap between Washington and what you see in the field. The most important aspect of this chart is this number 2020. I don't know how many of you think we'll be in Afghanistan in 2020, or how deep our commitments will be, but it is striking to see that in the case of Iraq, which isn't that different, General Dovic (sp) will say that the Iraqi forces will be ready for the counterinsurgency mission between 2012 and 2014. And the United States and Washington acts as if they'll be ready in 2009. The gap between the timeframe seen in

the field and the timeframes we see here for domestic political purposes is just one of the critical problems we face in coming to grips with this.

The other is the right. We have about as much chance of solving all of Afghanistan's problems and shifting its society to be a model of the United States by 2020 as we do of preserving a large snowfall in hell. And one of the issues here the sheer cultural arrogance of the United States in assuming that it can somehow change and transform societies to adopt our values on a broad level in a limited amount of time with limited resources.

I won't take you through the rest of this list in depth, but I do want to make a few closing points. First, nobody working in Iraq uses the word reconciliation. They use the word accommodation because the best you can hope for is the kind of functional coexistence that doesn't involve a lot of killing and a lot of violence. You've got to set goals with broken or failed states which are realistic. You have to look at regional issues. We basically ignore real-world regional problems in going into both Afghanistan and – (unintelligible) – and learn the hard way.

There are a lot of lessons for U.S. forces. One caution I would give you, having been through this in Vietnam half a century ago, the lessons really are case specific. And you'd better get it right and you'd better react quickly. We haven't done that. If you look at the expenditure flows in both Afghanistan and in Iraq, we reacted extremely slowly. We got things done in the field very slowly in terms of change. And we couldn't have a balanced approach to priorities.

(Unintelligible) – multipliers in terms of country, this is General Petraeus' goal. It is essentially to convert from U.S. combat forces to a limited strategic overwatch by U.S. forces which are in an advisory and support role. There's no timeline here.

The problem is this requires us to effectively create a foreign army. It took us five years to fund the basic structure of the force. Funding doesn't mean you actually get supplies there. We're still having a major FMS delivery problem. We forgot almost every lesson we learned in Vietnam. No one has ever created an effective army or police force in modern times by having training centers and training facilities. You have only done it by embedding, by creating partner units, by supporting combat units in the field until they can actually achieve combat roles. And these are the most critical lessons of our experience in Afghanistan and Iraq.

A general caution – no one has ever successfully created a functioning police force in a country with a major counterinsurgency problem and a broken pattern of governance and law enforcement in any campaign since World War II. What is amazing is to hear again and again we're going to send in civilian police advisors, or we're going to make this work, when we can't staff the U.S. military advisors to the Afghan or Iraqi army, and when the historical model of police change in fixing (MRIs?) is 100 percent failure.

It's about time we had a little grounding in reality here and a lot less grounding in hope.

Governance, the fact is the U.S. military is the primary functioning group trying to improve local and regional governance in Iraq. There are some very good people from State. They are very limited on ground; I think even in terms of assignment slots were about 60 percent that are formally supposed to be there. If any of you are working for a member, look at the résumés of a lot of these civilians. Many of them are short-term contract personnel with zero field experience. Many of them are FSOs who are there because they stopped the clock on forcible selection out.

And I had the head of the aid mission in Iraq tell me point blank he didn't want to see another Goddamn foreign service officer without development experience get assigned because it was more problems to have him than it was to simply not have the person at all.

Development – the truth again, most of development works in the field now is as much military as civilian. When it works, you've got somebody who's stayed long enough to get the expertise or had the expertise before. One great caution – I hear a lot about civilian reserve corps or assigning people from other departments. How many of you – and this is a rhetorical question, you don't need to raise your hand – have ever actually worked in a state-controlled economy? How many of you have ever really functioned in an extraordinarily corrupt society? How many of you have actually had to deal with the functioning problems of a ministry which uses a ledger system and where trying to modernize it will break it, rather than fix it?

MR. ROEMER: Tony, I'm glad nobody from CNP has raised their hand.
(Laughter.)

MR. CORDESMAN: The caution I would give you is the illusion we have corps expertise. We had people with continuity in Vietnam from AID. We had more people in Vietnam then from AID than we have AID globally today. And we didn't do all that well at times in Vietnam.

One last point. All of you have read history. You all know where we are in Iraq or Afghanistan. How many times in similar cases, even if things go well, could you predict the political alignment, the economy, and the development of a country 10 years in the future? History really is uncertain. The illusion that you can use military force and civilians to control the future is dangerous.

Second, if your idea is that somehow we go in and we convert them to Indiana, Arizona, or the Beltway, you are certainly going to fail. If you constantly treat your host country as if it was a client, rather than a partner, the reaction is pretty well predictable. And second, the risks and uncertainties here are going to be extraordinarily difficult at local, national, and regional levels, almost regardless of where you go and how you do it.

You can't get rid of a high element of risk through reorganization, better means, or better intentions.

Ladies and gentlemen, with that, let me quit and address whatever questions you may have about this, Iraq or Afghanistan.

MR. ROEMER: Well, you're going to have a lot of questions, Tony. Terrific, excellent presentation that puts a lot on the table. I want to thank you for that.

(END)