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Institutionalizing Stability Operations Lessons

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Institutionalizing Stability Operations Lessons

by Dr. Nadia Schadlow

I like William Easterly because he's usually right on the money. The respected economist took on the aid-industrial complex in his trenchant analysis of the persistent dysfunctions of the development community, *[White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good](#)*. In that book, which is very much worth reading, Easterly carefully documents how decades of aid failed to produce desired outcomes because it ignored local realities, tended to apply "utopian" plans, lacked approaches to measure and evaluate actual outcomes (as opposed to money spent), and ultimately, failed to impose any accountability for failure. Thus, literally billions of dollars have been wasted, with few material benefits for the individuals on the ground such aid sought to help.

Nonetheless, [on his NYU post](#), in which Easterly takes on the Army's new *[Stability Operations manual](#)* (FM 3-07) for being too utopian and exemplifying a tendency toward "social engineering" gone awry, I think his analysis is mistaken. Easterly is conflating the need for preparation under fire, with the desire to build a colonial Army that would go out and change the world. He argues that "The danger is that, if put into practice, such delusions create excessive ambition, which creates excessive use of military force, which kills real human beings, Afghans and Iraqis."

The Army has learned the hard way that the failure to prepare for the intensely political machinations of war can cost both military and civilian lives. It was apparent within days after the fall of Baghdad in April of 2003, that navigating the political landscape of Iraq would become paramount for any consolidation of the operational successes that had just occurred. U.S. political leaders failed to understand too. Over and over again, accounts during the next few years in Iraq, revealed how many young captains, majors and lieutenant colonels had to learn on the ground, under fire, literally, as they sought to figure out the murky politics of getting Iraqis to stop killing each other. Yes, we could have just left, but most agreed that a bloodbath would have ensued - an outcome that was not in U.S. interests.

This manual reflects the Army's first effort, in a long, long time, to institutionalize lessons related to the political challenges inherent in any war. It reflects an understanding that wars are not just about force on force combat, but fundamentally about politics. And like it or not, in every conflict in its history, the U.S. Army has been enmeshed in politics

on the ground. This does not mean it wants to go out and change the world. Few Army officers would express such a view: indeed, Army engineers aren't eager to become social engineers. Rather, it means they don't want to be caught off guard.

Sure, the issues raised in the Stability Operations manual are daunting. From spurring economic development, to addressing the root causes of conflict, to integrating the use of military force with non-military actors – we wouldn't wish these kinds of complex challenges on our enemies. But spelling them out and thinking about how to approach conflict as more than a force-on-force problem is a requirement and a responsibility for U.S. political and military leaders. Precisely because such challenges are inherent to war and are so daunting, they should give pause to US political leaders who make the decision to go to war. But if, after careful consideration, political leaders make a decision to use force, we might as well have the best prepared Army that we possibly can. That's what this manual is about.

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Schmedlap  :

Good news for Mr. Easterly. We don't really worry about doctrine once we deploy.

But, even if we did, I think he overestimates the contributions of organizations other than the US military. He asks, *"Who is going to do all this? The US Army is going to be assisted by other US government agencies, intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations, international and region organizations and the private sector..."*

Look at the percentage of forces in Afghanistan or Iraq that are US forces. Next, look at where the non-US forces are deployed - generally the safest areas. The same goes for private sector individuals - they are generally either US contractor or foreign nationals directly under US supervision.

"... i.e people who have different approaches, different objectives, different incentives, and answer to different bosses, with no credible mechanism for coordination..."

I think recent experience proves him wrong. We have seen such a conglomeration of entities in Iraq and our coordination is not perfect, but it is adequate, and certainly contradicts his assertion that there is "no credible mechanism."

As for different objectives, incentives, and bosses, so what? The Red Cross has long had different objectives than us, but we work well with them because our differing objectives

are compatible. The same can be said of other organizations - different objectives and incentives are okay, so long as they are compatible with ours.

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