

The Role of the Military in Combating Terrorism



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Brigadier General (Ret.) David Reist, USMC

Operation Iraqi Freedom, Deputy Commanding General for Governance and Economics in Anbar Province from February 2006-February 2007 and Vice President, Strategy and Planning Division, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies

Dr. Lawrence J. Korb

Senior Fellow at American Progress, Senior Advisor to the Center for Defense Information, and an adjunct professor at Georgetown University

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Please contact the Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies,

901 North Stuart Street, Suite 200, Arlington, VA 22203
Tel. 703-562-4513, 703-525-0770 ext. 237 Fax 703-525-0299
yalexander@potomac institute.org www.potomac institute.org
www.terrorismelectronicjournal.org www.iucts.org

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Dr. Wallace and Dr. Alexander, thank you for including me in this distinguished panel on a topic that has been discussed in the past and likely will gain further attention in the future. In dealing with this topic, there are all the rules and laws that guide what the military can do and then there are the perceptions of the American people of what the military should do. Also, let's remember that there are limits of what the military is able to do, both from a capabilities standpoint and from the vantage point of what is required to be accomplished – enthusiasm is not a capability and “want” does not make it so. I will attempt to address the topic from the perspective of former practitioner and as an American citizen. Although comments will be confined to US military, leveraging allied/coalition capabilities are likely crucial to attain a desired end-state for a variety of reasons.

The military does possess a wide array of skill sets and their organizational construct makes it very attractive to be called upon. Simply, when given a mission the military puts a single person in charge and they focus on mission accomplishment – anything short of this is failure. The ability to respond quickly due to resources, training, and readiness coupled with the scale that those capabilities can be applied is unmatched.

The complex issue of declaring war on terrorists, offensive (that is pre-emptive) or defensive operations, CONUS or OCONUS are all factors that need to be carefully considered. Most feel that the pre-emption of terrorist actions is warranted – get them before they get us. This involves the development and kluging of intelligence assets across the interagency and our allies to be effective – and this is expensive and difficult. It also involves the potential use of military capabilities that some call into question as a mission for military forces. If a threat is emerging from country X, is country X then a candidate for Nation building or mil-to-mil engagement (FID)? Are military forces placed on the ground in an attempt to shape behavior (for US advantage or in our image) and gain insight on actions that could harm the US? Or do we watch country X by engaging with country Y, which just happens to be adjacent to country X? And if we discover terrorist intentions, when do we act (and if actions are conducted too late the average American will ask “You knew about this and you didn't stop it because of?” Last, does the local populace harbor those terrorists willingly?

There is also the image of the US military in a foreign country as an unwanted entity by that country. Our nation should be aware of perceptions, both by citizens of our country and the country we are deployed to. There is a delicate balance between assisting and the military being perceived as the “Emperors force” – and this balance is timeless. There is also the danger of knee-jerk reactions in employing military forces. At times, the military might be the only tool that can be applied quickly, but it may not be the right tool. Allied forces may be a better solution for a host of reasons, but common cause and a willing coalition is difficult to put together at times.

Whether the military is the right or wrong approach, I'd like to offer a thought relative to the fiber of the young men and women who are performing these tasks. We have an all-volunteer, all-recruited force. In dealing with terrorists, the high visibility forces gain the attention of the news media with high profile raids – they are superb. There simply are not enough of these forces. When the military deploys in nation building, mil-to-mil engagements, or any other type of mission that projects the face of the United States to another country, it is the basic Corporal or Lieutenant that is the face of the US in country X. They are superb. They need no training to exude the ideals of the US and demonstrate caring and compassion. This can be articulated by the State Department and General's, but the impact via example and demonstration of righteousness is powerful – and lasting. Our young men and woman, when led well, will never let us down in this forum, whether a farm kid from Iowa or a gang member from Chicago. Also, the employment of the total force is critical. The reserve component (and the guard) offer capabilities, approaches, and ideas that are not sometimes found in the active duty force. This likely applies more to non-kinetic solution sets, but the applicability of skills (think cyber for example) is potentially priceless in taking the fight to terrorists creating the most robust tool set possible.

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To lighten things up, do we have any Redskins fans here? Well, I want to tell you a joke that is making its way around the Pentagon. Given what has happened with Hagel and Carter, a reporter called me the other day and said, "What do you think of this? 'Chuck Hagel is RGI and Bruce Allen, who is the General Manager, is Susan Rice – who is the National Security advisor - and guess who is Dan Snyder? Obama.'" Then, of course if you follow it, Ash Carter is Colt McCoy.

Let me put this subject in proper perspective. To do this, we have to be careful with the terms we use. We are talking about the military's role in combating terrorism. Terrorism is a tactic. What you have to focus on is which groups are you going after. I think this how we got ourselves into trouble after 9/11, when we declared war on terrorism. We are never going to win; I mean, terrorism is a tactic. You know what is interesting, I was talking to someone from the FBI when I was on CNN the other day, and he said, "We still have Neo-Nazis, committing acts of terror, even though Hitler is dead." I think that is important.

The other issue is that, the generals have talked about the fact that we have a lot of challenges, but none of these pose an existential threat. In other words, I hope Iraq turns out well, but if it does not, it is not the end of the world for us. And ISIS or ISIL, could they cause problems? I was in New York on 9/11, I remember seeing it, it was terrible. Three thousand people died. We are a country of almost 300 million.

Now, during the Cold War, we had an existential threat. I came on active duty before the Cuban Missile Crisis. We thought it was over. We were lucky, because we had something like a thousand soldiers and marines in Florida getting ready to go to invade Cuba, and the Soviets had delegated to the on-scene commander the authority to fire nuclear weapons if we invaded. And we came very, very close. Fortunately, you know, we arrived at a negotiated solution. So I think that is important to keep in mind.

It has already been mentioned here that yes the military is important in this struggle, but it is not the only thing. All the tools we have must be there. For years I have argued that we ought to have a unified national security budget. Tell me how much you want to spend on the Pentagon, State, Homeland Security combined; come up with the amount, and then let us see if we can allocate it better in terms of, do we need more soldiers, or do we need more aid workers? Do we want to buy a new weapons system or do we want to provide more aid? I think that is important. Tell me how much is in your budget and I will tell you how I think you can spend it better.

The next issue we have to be careful about is the terms we use. Obama says we are going to degrade and defeat ISIS. You cannot defeat them militarily. You can degrade them; you are not going to defeat them. It is an ideology. As long as people believe in that ideology, it will not be defeated. What you have to do is undermine the ideology. Now, if the military degrades

them, undermines their narrative, that helps. But people are going to buy into that ideology because their lives are terrible, or they are not getting the opportunities that they want. Look at all the folks going over there to fight with them. Some from our country, a lot from European countries.

The other fact is, and it has already been mentioned here, is that we cannot do this by ourselves. It is not just the US military and the other government agencies; we need other countries to help us, because of the fact that they give us legitimacy in this fight. We are an exceptional nation, I think we are very good, but we are not perfect. We make mistakes. We think that when we go into a country that we are going to be greeted as liberators. Not necessarily.

I remember the first time I went to Iraq—Rumsfeld brought a group of us together to evaluate the situation in the Fall of 2003. I was talking to this professor at Saddam Hussein University, a Shi'ite, and he said, "Do you know who else said we came as liberators not as occupiers?" I said, General Maude, the British. He said, "Why did you say it again?" Well, I do not know why the President said it; I hope someone told him that. But that is what you have to understand. I remember when I was a young man in Vietnam; one of my last jobs was to coordinate the air tactics with the swift boats in the _____ time operation. Which, by the way, when Kerry was running and people started beating up on him, I could not believe it. I have done a lot of things in my life Riding on a swift boat was the scariest thing I have ever done. But anyway, so one day we were over in Cam Ranh Bay to talk to the swift boat crews and when we were coming back, we got lost. We were in a Jeep, we were not even armed. We used to fly planes so we were not used to this. So I saw a sign there—my French was better then, having gone to Catholic schools—that said, "Behave yourself because tonight you might meet your maker" in French. So I said, Commander, let us go there, maybe they can give us directions. We went in, and the monks were really nice, they talked to us, in French. Then we get back in the Jeep, and the Commander said, "You guys talked a lot, what else did you say?" "Sir, I do not know how to tell you this. The priest said, "Why do you think you are going to make out any better here than the French?" Now, we are not the French, but we were perceived that way in Vietnam.

I do a lot of TV news shows. I was on in 2004 with Bill O'Reilly, which of course is worse than going to combat, I can tell you that. So, anyway, while we were on the subject of Bush's military service, because of claims made by Dan Rather. So he said to me, "What difference do you think it would have made if Bush and Cheney had been in the military and gone to Vietnam?" I said to him the same thing; they would have recognized that you are not going to be greeted as liberators in these countries with a different culture. It is tough on these young kids when they go there, because they really want to do the right thing, and as the General said they are really motivated. But that is not how we are perceived, unfortunately, in many of these countries. There is a lot of foreign media there, you have Al-Jazeera and etc., and you go on listening to them and saying, my god, that is not us. But that is the kind of narrative that you get.

In fighting this war which has been going on in one form or another since 9/11, we talked about the brave young people, and these kids are terrific, but let me tell you something. When we

set up the volunteer military, people forget there were three components. Number one, a comparatively small active force, because now you are going to have to pay people. General, do you remember what you and I used to get? \$200 per month. Now you are going to have to pay a living wage, so manpower will be expensive so you will have a smaller active force. Then, you are going to have a Guard and Reserve that is ready to go. Up until we had a volunteer military, the Guard and Reserve would be where you get away from home on weekends. We were not serious about it. Now you have to be serious and be able to be called up. The third leg of the stool was selective service registration. We still register, people forget that.

One of the things I had to do when I was in government was persuade President Reagan to keep the selective service because, given his libertarian leanings, he had campaigned against it. One of the arguments I made was, you may have a prolonged conflict, and you want to be able to mobilize. Now, we did not do that at the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to me that was a flippant disgrace. Yes, we had great people. But did you know the army and the marines gave 80,000 moral waivers to take people in at the height of that conflict? Yes, we had great people, but look at some of those we took in. Anyone know who Private Steven Green is? Private Steven Green, who is serving life imprisonment now in a jail in Kentucky had three misdemeanor convictions, was a high school dropout, and had a personality disorder, yet they gave him a waiver and took him into the army. Several people recommended not deploying and they sent him anyway. While he was over there, together with two other people, he raped a 14-year-old girl and killed her and her family. Then they decided that he had a personality disorder and they sent him back, not knowing about this incident. Of course it came out when the other two people with him confessed. He is serving life in prison. Why did we take him in? Because we were desperate to meet our goal. Why did we not have conscription? That would have gotten the American people involved. Congress did pass the AUMF in 2002.

Do you know how many Senators read the classified intelligence analysis about the case for war in Iraq before they voted? Only members of Congress could read it, but not many did. The majority of them voted for war in Iraq without reading it. Let me tell you, if they had conscription, they would have gone in and they would have read that thing. I have not read it, obviously, I am not a member. Senator Bob Graham (D-FL), who was the chairman of the intelligence committee at that time told me, "If you read that, you will know the case for going to war in Iraq is somewhat shaky." Let us go and activate the selective service system, to get people, and get, as General Stanley McChrystal said, get American people with skin in the game.

Let me conclude with this. We talked about this fight and the declining defense budget. Let me tell you something, the defense department has plenty of money. In real terms, even with sequester, defense is at the level of 2007. I am talking about the base budget. This is not like after Korea or Vietnam or the end of the Cold War. Do you know in the middle of the '70s, where we were in terms of today's dollars in terms of the base budget? \$350 billion! We are at \$500 billion today, so we have plenty of money. The money is plentiful, if you manage it right. Now, we could sit down and tell you about the things we need to do. Are they going to be done, are they hard to do. One of the lobbies, let me tell you in my view, one of the worst lobbies in Washington is MOAA, Military Officers Association of America. Do you know what Admiral Ryan makes, who runs that thing? Anybody have any idea? Close to \$700 thousand. Whenever something comes up to restore compensation to the agreed-upon standard they fight it. For

example, the housing allowance, supposed to cover 75% of housing costs, now covers 100%. Chuck Hagel wanted to take it down to 95%, MOAA argued that you are “breaking promises.” When Ryan and Murray tried to say cola minus one for working age retirees, until you are 62, they were dragging out enlisted people and talking about them, not including the fact that when they enlisted the retirement pay after 20 years of service was supposed to be 40%, but that it was increased to 50% after they had joined the service. Then they claimed that COLA minus-one was hurting all veterans. How many veterans retire? How many enlisted marines retire? 4 or 5% of the kids that come into the ground forces. Because you guys know the ground forces are like running backs in football, the people in the infantry do not retire at high levels either. So we need to deal with compensation. If we do not, even if the budget goes up a little bit, but it is not going to go up a lot. The military that is going to be fighting this battle against groups like ISIS, they are not going to have the resources.

Finally, of course, we have got to learn to manage. Let me conclude and read you this, I am not going to tell you who said it until after I finish. “Here too we have to acknowledge an inconvenient fact: sequestration has occurred in part because of a growing frustration with a culture of waste and inefficiency at the defense department that went unaddressed for too long. I have witnessed the emergence of a military industrial complex that has corrupted and crippled the defense acquisition process. This system can now be said to be successful in only one respect, turning billions of taxpayer dollars into weapons systems that are consistently delivered late, flawed, and vastly over-budget, if that is the systems are delivered at all. ”—John McCain.

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Please contact the Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 901 North Stuart Street, Suite 200, Arlington, VA 22203. Tel.: 703-525-0770 Email: yalexander@potomac institute.org, ICTS@potomac institute.org