

The recent *Rolling Stone* article that precipitated the embarrassing dismissal of General Stanley McChrystal, former Commander of U.S. Forces Afghanistan, has brought to light some of the deepest rifts within our military. The American people are used to hearing about quibbles in Congress and dissenters within the administration. But most Americans know very little about the goings on of one of the most important organs of the U.S. government: the armed forces.

Crass comments made by McChrystal and members of his staff got the most press, but the *Rolling Stone* article also raised a fundamental question about the direction of global military strategy. McChrystal was a proponent of the counterinsurgency doctrine (COIN), the brainchild of some of the military's best and brightest including then Lieutenant General David Petraeus. The controversial doctrine emphasizes the importance of legitimacy and governance, which has ruffled the feathers of some of the more traditionalist proponents of pure use of force.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have put to the test the greatest military in the world. The U.S. spent \$664 billion on defense in 2009—more than the EU, China, Japan, and Russia combined.¹ And yet, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which cost almost nothing to manufacture and use, are responsible for nearly 75% of all U.S. casualties in Iraq.² The obvious lesson from the experience in Iraq and Afghanistan is that warfare has evolved and so too must our military. But how?

The post-Cold War era has seen a shift in violent conflict from interstate warfare characterized by proxy wars and rivalry among superpowers to civil war and insurgency. In confronting these new challenges, the effectiveness of our defense strategy will not be determined by how many missiles we have in our arsenals or how many nuclear submarines we have in international waters.

Our security depends on the stability of other nations and our defense strategy must reflect that reality. For better or worse, recent history has shown that nation building will likely continue to be an important part of American foreign policy. Somalia is the obvious example of what happens when we ignore the issue of nation building. This archetypal failed state has now become home to al Shabaab, a terrorist group with links to al Qaeda. Nation building is complex and if it is to ever succeed, the armed forces must adapt.

First, the military should invest more into developing small, highly specialized contingents of troops. In a nation building operation where legitimacy and trust count for everything, winning the battle of hearts and minds is the keystone to operational success. The U.S. Special Forces in Afghanistan have conducted much of the community outreach. We need more of them, with an emphasis on language skills. One easy way to

¹ GAO, "Maximizing DOD's Untapped Potential to Improve Business Performance," GAO-10-184CG October 14, 2009.

² GAO, "Rapid Acquisition of Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles," GAO-08-884R, July 15, 2008.

achieve that goal is to allow women serve in combat positions including within the Special Forces.

Additionally, the military should set aside resources for developing contingents that specialize in policing functions. As we have seen in Iraq and Afghanistan, police forces are imperative to securing a region and, more importantly, keeping it secure. This is not to say that the United States should take over the policing function if local capacity exists—local is always better. But where that capacity does not exist, the U.S. military must be ready to fill that need.

Defenders of the *ancien regime* point to threats like Iran and North Korea. Even though the majority of conflicts may be small-scale and internal, the argument goes, the magnitude of a one large-scale interstate attack on the U.S. necessitates traditional defense capabilities.

Let me emphasize that I do not advocate a complete abandonment of traditional military weapons. I advocate a shifting of priorities. The U.S. military should undoubtedly maintain key components of its current defense posture such as missile defense systems.

We should, however, refocus our efforts on domestic defense and minimize our “forward presence.” By forward presence I mean overseas bases, deployment of fleets in international waters, and foreign training exercises. Stationing aircraft carriers in the Persian Gulf is unlikely to deter Iranian nuclear ambitions—but it is highly likely to be used by extremists as a visual representation of American hegemony. In other words, not only do these expensive detachments no longer help us but they actually weaken our position geopolitically.

It is not a question of COIN or no COIN. After all, results of its success in Iraq and Afghanistan are mixed at best. To conquer the threats to U.S. national security—which is becoming more and more synonymous with global security—requires a fundamental restructuring of the U.S. military, trimming down the bulk and investing in human capital to create a lightweight, highly mobile fighting force.

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