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GUEST ESSAY

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Synchronizing National Security Priorities and US Business Interests Overseas: A Model for Reducing Risk

By John Gerlaugh

US personnel working in both Iraq and Afghanistan note a common theme emerging from their decade plus reconstruction efforts. Both countries' officials and private citizens consistently expressed deep disappointment at the US inability to help them access economic opportunity. Surprisingly, even many senior US officials expressed amazement at the depth of poverty and lack of economic development, especially in Iraq, where access to global markets and capital had been cut severely by sanctions. The scope of these economic problems was significantly larger than was initially understood by US planners, and our reaction took years to produce arguably modest results as we scrambled to formulate supporting policy and doctrine.

It is now clear that American national security objectives in those two theaters of war were put at risk of failure through an over reliance on the application of military or "hard power", and with little planning and resources directed towards understanding and improving core economic conditions. Outcomes in both countries remain uncertain but it is clear in hindsight that the US lost critical opportunities through poor planning during the shaping phase (Phase 0) and following initial combat operations (Phase 3 -- Dominate) by lacking the ability to reinforce success. Realistic economic development plans, properly resourced to win the post-combat stabilization phase (Phase 4) would almost certainly have reduced the risk posed to a positive strategic outcome in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We're changing how we define development... we need to harness all the tools at our disposal – from our diplomacy to our trade and investment policies.
President Barack Obama

Absent robust plans and resources to ensure the enduring growth of post-conflict economic opportunity, military force is not enough to ensure accomplishment of American national security objectives. To the contrary, combat operations invariably reduce the target countries' economic development potential leaving the country even more vulnerable to instability. American national security officials should ensure that future US military campaign plans are integrated into a larger framework of significant, resourced economic development plans that begin in Phase 0.

To accomplish this seemingly abstract objective will require development of a new set of authorities that direct the interagency to more actively support strategic economic growth *before* a military solution is required. For the Department of Defense (DoD), Regional Combatant Commanders (known as COCOMs) will be instrumental in developing and integrating these new authorities in Phase 0, with a desired outcome focused on reducing risk of state collapse and the subsequent need for American military intervention.

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Discussion

Military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are relative anomalies in the conduct of American foreign policy and must be considered in the unique context of the 9/11 attacks. However, from these two theaters of war emerge the lessons often cited by the early Clinton administration: "It's the economy, stupid". Planning for future strategic success must include specific resources to address economic development. This idea is neither new nor is it a silver bullet for solving vexing national security challenges present in Libya, Syria, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq or Yemen. But there are a number of countries where the deliberate, orchestrated encouragement of US private sector investment in international emerging markets as a function of US national security priorities would reduce social pressures and thus risk of conflict. This deliberate and early application of US economic power (versus relying upon "hard power" later) is an option available to US policy makers.

Many countries important to US national security interests have governments that relate more closely to military and security communities than traditional western-style civilian democracies. This circumstance may give the US regional COCOMs an edge in strategic security dialogs incorporating this new approach.

In certain instances, the US COCOMs could play a highly productive role in this shaping process, applying considerable staff resources and regional knowledge to identify where strategic economic resources might be applied. Example candidate countries might include Jordan, Oman, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Nicaragua, Colombia, and Mexico whose under-performing markets and frequent uneven political landscape place them at risk of instability. Like Egypt before Tahrir Square, fundamental economic opportunity, market health, and wealth accumulation mechanisms in these countries are insufficient to generate a robust, healthy, enduring middle class. This despite the presence of stability, governance, and in some instances natural resources.

While much progress may be accomplished using traditional US foreign-aid approaches, these Cold War-era practices often create or perpetuate "donor-nation" relationships casting US efforts as demeaning and politically unpalatable. An additional downside to this model involves underperforming foreign aid country portfolios that have become targets for public criticism and Congressional budget cutters.

Is there a better, more pro-active approach that could link appropriate elements of US economic power, specifically American foreign investment in emerging markets, with the strategic reach of US regional COCOMs? Could more be done to affect early, favorable outcomes by synchronizing US economic interests with US regional strategic priorities in Phase 0, especially where there is evidence that US national security priorities and economic interests serve a common purpose? The concept of a US military/US private sector partnership, carefully structured to support unique emerging national security issues is intriguing. In practice this new approach would be synchronized to support other US national security stakeholder's efforts. The immediate benefit would be an increase in opportunities for regional shaping that are not presently available.

Nothing demonstrates diplomacy's relevance more than its ability to contribute to America's economic renewal. And nothing will support strong American diplomacy abroad better than a strong and vibrant American economy. Since 95 percent of the world's consumers live outside the United States, Americans have a big stake in the role diplomats play in opening markets abroad, strengthening the economic rules of the road... Secretary of State John Kerry continually reminds our diplomats that "foreign policy is economic policy."
Amb William Burns

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Conclusion

There is an emerging body of evidence that supports greater partnering between the senior US regional security representatives (the COCOMs) and American private sector interests in order to increase the likelihood of favorable US national security outcomes. Where there are indicators of increasing risk in countries of genuine strategic importance to the US, American regional COCOMs must have the authority and inter-agency support to help ensure US private sector economic opportunities are considered in the US national security calculus. Many countries are essentially militarized autocracies that marginalize healthy economic development, creating fault lines between civil society and government. This increases risk of internal civil disorder often encouraged by external actors. Under these circumstances, US regional COCOMs may be well positioned to help identify opportunities where economic growth would benefit US national security interests. In those instances where national command authorities approve, these COCOMs and their staffs should be prepared and doctrinally encouraged to exercise influence along economic development lines as a full member of the interagency partnership in concert with State, Commerce and the other key US inter-agency members.

Across each of the three pillars of the updated defense strategy, the Department is committed to finding creative, effective, and efficient ways to achieve our goals and assist in making strategic choices. Innovation – within our own Department and in our interagency and international partnerships – is a central line of effort.
**General Dempsey
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff**

As we have seen in Afghanistan and Iraq, abundant natural resources are no guarantee of social stability when the average citizen has poor opportunities for wealth accumulation. Adding limited, well-defined economic engagement tools to the COCOM's security cooperation portfolio would help promote the stabilizing forces of economic development in countries of strategic significance to the US. Deliberate consideration of economic

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development in COCOM planning would not be precedence setting but is enough of a departure from the norm to warrant development of unique statutory and regulatory mechanisms. Though a difficult inter-agency review awaits such a proposal, it is important not to limit our engagement approaches to the existing, somewhat aged, cold-war-era security cooperation portfolio. Instead we must have an active dialog around the potential advantages of opening the regional COCOM's security engagement aperture to include economic development as a deliberate method of shaping our national security posture in those instances and places where it makes sense to do so.

Mr. Gerlaugh is a retired OSD Policy official who taught National Security Studies and the Afghanistan Pakistan Regional Studies courses at the National Defense University. He is a former Marine Corps Officer and was the Director of Counter Terrorism Policy during the 2004-2006 timeframe. He served multiple tours as a stabilization advisor in both Iraq and Afghanistan.