World Food Programme ship The Martin unloads pallets of high energy biscuits at the Freeport of Monrovia, Bushrod Island, Liberia, 15 Aug 2003, during the Second Liberian Civil War. U.S. Marines from 26ᵗʰ Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) secure the area.

The Art of Strategy Creation for Complex Situations

BY JOHN BLANEY

> *"All men can see the tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved".*
> *Sun Tzu (c. 500 B.C.)*

A chieving peace and stabilization from complex situations truly is a wicked problem.[1] Just one subset of complex situations, those having to do with irregular conflict, contains great variation—from peacekeeping or stability operations, to counterinsurgency campaigns, and can morph back and forth from one to another. Complex situations more broadly defined include non-conflict calamities as well, such as natural disasters, and, increasingly, conflict-prevention efforts. Each case is unique because of a host of important factors—such as history and geography—as well as more dynamic factors like the nature of the crisis, socioeconomic dimensions, power relationships, the external actors involved, governance variations, and differing political situations. Furthermore, operating in permissive environments versus non-permissive ones is an important differentiator when dividing types of complex situations. Non-permissive environments understandably tend to be dominated by security priorities. And, complicating things even more, it is usually a question of how permissive an environment is, not whether it is entirely permissive or completely non-permissive.

The type, nature, and goals of complex situations vary greatly. For example, in situations such as a tsunami or an earthquake, donors provide rapid assistance to substitute for inadequate local capacity. A counterinsurgency or stability campaign, however, usually involves a longer-term commitment with more complex goals, including local institution building, even nation-building, and where local buy-in is much more important.[2] Because of wide circumstantial variation, there is unfortunately no cookie-cutter strategy, no single paradigm, no set sequencing of actions, nor one formula that will serve as a blueprint for handling such a broad universe of complex situations. Even action sequencing, necessary to address complex situations, inevitably varies. Not even

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the establishment of security as the essential first step of any stabilization sequence, an assertion voiced constantly, is always the correct initial move.

In Liberia in mid-2003, for example, diplomacy moved on the ground to end the war on the battlefield before security was established. The situation changed from violent chaos into something that was still a complex and dangerous mess, but more manageable. West African peacekeeping forces then moved in to separate the combatant parties, secure the ground, and keep the war stopped. Had they tried to move in before battlefield diplomatic actions were taken, the African peacekeepers would have become another combatant party, which is exactly what was expected to happen.[3]

Non-Linearity of Complex Situations

Not only does correct sequencing of measures vary case-by-case in complex situations, but handling such situations on the ground is decisively not a linear experience. Problems are rarely resolved permanently. They are seemingly solved, but then appear again and again or morph into new problems. In fact, those who try to deal with such complex situations will be doomed to failure if they try to address the spectrum of issues facing them seriatim, that is, one-by-one.

Leaders must multitask and create positive movement along many fronts at once, all of them with differing objectives and timelines. For example, in Liberia, after ending the war, the United States was simultaneously providing large-scale humanitarian relief; trying to keep firefights from restarting the war; planning for the arrival of badly needed United Nations (UN) peacekeepers; securing resources for upcoming disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration of combatants; working on returning home displaced Liberians and refugees; striving desperately to somehow restart a dead Liberian economy; supporting an election still 18 months away as later stipulated in Liberia's Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and much more. It was a spectrum effort, conducted by remarkably few personnel. In such complex situations, linear thinking, that moves seductively from war to peace, can be misleading.[4]

An Art, Not a Science

The key to the art, not the science, but the art, of strategy creation is to design a multi-pronged, simultaneous approach tailored to each individual case, and then be flexible as circumstances change—and they will. All activities affect all others and the overall success or failure of the outcome. Security, of course, has a vital function providing necessary structural integrity to a highly dynamic process.

Here and There, the Past and the Future

With so much emphasis on the uniqueness, non-linearity, and varying situations, an important dilemma presents itself: how transferrable is the role of doctrine, best practices, and lessons learned from one complex situation to another and from past cases to future ones? After all, this area of knowledge is quite unlike the sciences, such as chemistry. This is about dealing with very different human beings in various contexts and cultures, reflecting many and changing variables. So, doing the same thing in one place, or the same sequence of actions done previously and successfully but in another situation and time, will often yield very different results, and even produce failure.

Is this analysis therefore an expression of nihilism? Not at all, it is rather one of realism. Freedom to conceptualize strategy is crucial, albeit that that process should not be done unschooled or recklessly. Conceptual thought should be tempered, but not bound, by knowledge of doctrine, of the past, and of lessons learned. Doctrine, the study of best practices, and lessons learned are all useful, but only as suggestive guidelines, not as recipes in a strategic cookbook. They will greatly stimulate thinking in creative leaders faced with new complex situations, but they should not be seen as conceptually binding handcuffs. Indeed, the secret ingredient to the art of strategy creation is people—more specifically, smart leaders and their advisers, especially those on the ground who are both trained and able to visualize creatively and holistically when faced with new problems or even seemingly familiar ones, but in differing contexts. Having knowledgeable, interdisciplinary, flexible-thinking, creative cadres is critical. Furthermore, there are some important cognitive guidelines that can help leaders create better strategy. Moreover, systematic review of the architectural elements of strategy can also help ensure success.

Simplification—an Axiom for Success

Ironically perhaps, one of the most important guidelines when formulating strategies is to make complex situations less complex. One, albeit imperfect analogy, would be to think of complex situations as being like the old game, "pick-up sticks." The winner of this game is the person who can remove all the tangled sticks, one at a time, without disrupting a complex pile of them. In other words, the winner wins by careful simplification of a complex problem.

Although complex situations require simultaneous actions along several fronts, not seriatim like this game, much attention should be given to the guideline of simplification. For example, in wartime Liberia in 2003, peace was never going to be achieved without the exit of then-President Charles Taylor. As that simplification of the situation – Taylor's removal from Liberia – was in process, it then became possible to consider what to do to actually stop the fighting. When a fragile battlefield ceasefire held, a further simplification was pressed home—geographic separation of the three warring armies, with permissive injection of African peacekeepers between them. Later on, Liberia's still dangerous situation was simplified again by the UN disarmament of the combatant parties.

Causality and Leadership

Moving from complex situations to less complex ones should also help guide leadership methodologies and styles. In truly chaotic situations, causal relationships do not render consistent, logical outcomes. In such circumstances, it may be necessary for leaders to push boldly ahead without knowing precisely what will happen. If the situation becomes calmer, simpler, and more predictable, an effective leadership practice is often to build a web of peacemakers, and play a less unilateral leadership role.[5]

Forming or rebuilding contact groups, working more with allies, non-governmental organizations, and indigenous groups—building a peace web—can all help counter those who seek instability or a return to war.[6] It is not surprising, but unfortunate, that many U.S. diplomats and seemingly other leaders do not alter their leadership styles much regardless of

the changing nature and complexity of the situations they face.

The Elements of Strategy Creation for Complex Situations

Complementing such cognitive guidelines is a set of important elements to consider when creating strategy for differing situations. Of course, not all of them will apply universally. Indeed a complete list of elements to consider when creating strategy for a particular complex situation has to vary. Nevertheless, the following are some considerations that are fundamental to successful strategy creation in many complex situations.

1. Understand, discuss candidly, and frame the real strategic problems at hand

The problems in much of the Middle East and South Asia today for example are a Gordian Knot complicated by religion, schisms within Islam, with the Middle East Peace Process' lack of resolution, nuclear weapons, asymmetrical warfare, terrorism, and energy, as well as with pent-up repression, ethnic issues, national fragility, poverty and much more. Yet, there is often a tendency to under-appreciate the complexity and assess strategic progress on these highly complex, interlocking issues by focusing too much on shorter-term, tactical metrics, prior to engaging in the simplification process discussed above. For example, where are the Taliban's military positions? Were they pushed back by the troop surge? How many leaders of al-Qaeda have been killed? Yes, killing Bin Laden and again pushing back the Taliban were important and heroic actions. These actions, however, are tactical accomplishments, ones that should only be parts of comprehensive country-by-country and regional strategies.

Similarly, the so-called "Arab Spring" countries are in the midst of differing, fluid, and uncertain processes where outcomes are clearly not ending up as democratic as the initiators had hoped. The overall strategic problem for the West in some of these countries may be how best to approach politically, strategically, ideologically, economically, and theologically the rise of political Islam. This approach would include the key issue of pluralism in these societies as well as protecting the range of Western political and economic interests.

But in October 2011, NATO withdrew from Libya after its military successes, seemingly without a clear follow-on strategy in place. What was to come next in Libya? How likely is it that the Libyans will be able to sort out everything themselves? In fact, how many Libyans regard themselves as Libyans and do not affiliate more closely with their tribe or clan? What constructive, coordinated positive roles can foreign countries or organizations play without crossing Libyan perceptual boundaries of cultural hegemony? How are challenges to stability and arms control going to be met in Libya? How clearly defined is the role of the United Nations? How and when will disarmament be conducted? Will security sector reform be properly shaped? How will institutional capacity deficits be addressed? Can outside mediation be injected into unstable situations without being viewed as interference? Will the new Libya permit pluralism? How will economic stabilization (particularly employment) be addressed? And, how can the West best pursue its interests and relations with Libya? All these questions would have been relevant to framing the strategic problem.

A successful strategy must include understanding, candid discussion, and joint framing

of the full set of problems and threats at hand, with whole of government participation. Allies, international institutions and others should be included in this joint visionary process of strategy creation whenever possible. Strategy must also be developed on time, avoiding policy vacuums and event drift. Without strategy, military missions may be victorious, but gains from them risk becoming only tactical successes that are ephemeral.

2. "Is the Game Worth the Candle?[7]"

One of the major, unsung reasons the empire of the Soviet Union collapsed is that it was economically broken. Its economic construction was not guided by efficiency, but rather by the Communist Party's obsession for political control over the highly diverse groups of peoples comprising the USSR. Economically, the Soviet Union became chronically and increasingly inefficient. Furthermore, as a command economy, it skewed lavish resources towards its military and space programs. As a result, the fabric of the rest of the Soviet economy was feeble. In the long run, the Soviet Union's economy rusted to a halt and collapsed, despite belated efforts to reform it.[8]

Because of the vast systemic and other differences between the West and the USSR, comparisons must be made with great care. The same is true when comparing the Soviet Union and communist China. However, one thought is particularly nagging. No society has limitless resources (i.e., military, economic, social, and political), not even the United States. Every campaign launched will impact across-the-board on the country undertaking that endeavor. Thus, every country must accurately assess, insofar as possible, the costs and benefits involved in each complex situation—before commitment. Conflict or even involvement in complex situations can be very costly, is usually longer than anticipated, and often weakens militarily, economically, politically, and socially the fabric of those countries repeatedly addressing such situations.

In some cases, such as going into Afghanistan after 9/11/2001, or America entering WWII after Pearl Harbor, not much time was required considering whether the threshold for U.S. involvement had been met. However, in most cases, the course of action to take is much less clear. Some of the factors to consider are: How important is this situation to U.S. and allied interests? How much capacity is available to deal with the situation, including what is going on or likely to happen elsewhere? How much is commitment likely to cost (e.g., in lives and financially)? Who else will share the burden? What is the capacity of the prospective host country, including people and resources, to help deal with its own situation? What sort of partner will the host country make, and will it struggle and fight well to achieve victory? What third parties are likely to become involved, or be affected, how are they likely to react, and what are the likely consequences? What is the likely duration of the situation, and how and when will it be concluded? What will be considered a win? How will the U.S. and its allies exit? Domestically, how much durable political support is there for involvement?

It should not be assumed that the consequences of U.S. involvement in situations are always estimated beforehand accurately and carefully. In fact, from the American Civil War to Vietnam, and into the 21st century, the duration and costs of resolving wars or complex situations seem to have been chronically underestimated.[9] Although opinions vary sharply on whether each U.S. engagement was

worth its associated costs, the point is that, whenever possible, a better job needs to be done estimating likely total costs and benefits (i.e., military, political, social, and economic) before commitments are made.

3. Recognize the importance of the content of any peace agreement and UN resolutions in complex situations

In cases involving conflict and perhaps peacekeeping operations, the contents of peace agreements often determine what intervening outsiders are allowed to do. For example, how much sovereignty has a host country ceded to outsiders in order for them to work through underlying issues or not? How much design and architecture is in a peace agreement to chart the way forward, or are there too many missing pieces? Will there be an interim government established, and for how long? If an election is needed, is it specified? How much capacity will the interim government likely have to move pending issues forward? Is reform of the security sector adequately covered? If the peace agreement involved does not generally chart the way forward, the parties to it will likely find it difficult to make progress and may have a falling out. Incomplete, ambiguous, poorly designed, or even overly specific peace agreements are quite common.[10] Similarly, success or failure in handling complex situations is often determined by the nature and quality of UN resolutions. For example, mandate differences between Article VI and Article VII Security Council resolutions often decide what the international community and its peacekeepers are allowed to do in a host country.

tommy japan

U.S. Marines behind a tank in South Vietnam as it shoots over a wall. Few have predicted the duration or cost, in blood, treasure, or American values, of armed conflicts throughout history.

4. Embrace the need to capture and maintain momentum

Seldom is stabilization attempted in a benign environment. In fact, the stabilization environment is usually a highly dynamic and perilous one where, initially, those pushing for peace and stability, often led by outsiders, must set the agenda. Surprisingly, this is perhaps the most overlooked element of strategy creation.

If those advocating peace and stability simply wait to see what happens, ceding momentum to others who would undercut a peace-making or stabilization process, control will soon evaporate or shift to the enemies of peace. Leaders must habitually think ahead of the present, sometimes even take risks to keep things on course, and ensure control over the tempo of events. The current, dominant thinking is that local agents – i.e. the indigenous people – should lead the way in the myriad problem-solving actions necessary for stabilization and peace. Yes, local involvement, local buy-in, and, eventually, local ownership are all indeed critical. But, especially in the initial phases of spectrum stability operations, leaders must not stand around and await a consensus among the local counterparts on what to do next.

It should be borne in mind that outsiders usually come into a country, which is thereby surrendering part of its sovereignty, because something is seriously wrong, and the local communities cannot fix it themselves, and they do not have all the answers. If they had answers, outsiders would probably not be there.

It is unfortunate that momentum is not emphasized when making peace as it is when making war or in sports. In particular, programmatic momentum is a big part of securing, controlling, and setting agendas for the future. This point could be illustrated by recalling well-known recent programmatic gaps where positive momentum for stability was lost and even reversed, such as occurred in Iraq after the initial Coalition military take-down of Saddam Hussein's forces in 2003. A positive example, however, will serve just as well. In Liberia in 2003, urged by the U.S. Ambassador (the author), the UN commenced disarmament quickly, even as occasional fire-fights still occurred, knowing that there were not many UN peacekeepers on the ground. Indeed, a serious riot broke out at the first UN disarmament operation in December 2003. There was criticism from armchair pundits in both New York and Washington, even though the riot had been planned by the chains of command of those forces being disarmed, and would have occurred at any time disarmament commenced.

What the critics failed to grasp, however, is the importance of momentum in situations like this one. By launching disarmament quickly, the attention of tens of thousands of armed fighters turned from restarting the war in Liberia to "WIIFM," or, "What's In It For Me?" They wanted money for their weapons, and the first cracks in the chains of command of the fighters appeared. Although the UN's Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) program had to be suspended for a time, some seven thousand AK-47s were collected by the UN during this first outing. Ultimately, total DDRR participation topped 106,000 soldiers from three armies.

Tactically, it was awkward and somewhat risky to start DDRR so fast, but strategically, doing so was a critical and decisive action that kept up momentum for peace and stabilization. As disarmament continued, the U.S. in

particular was already focused on the next "D," that is, on "Demobilization." Due to funding limitations, the UN could provide only a short period of de-programming of the fighters, and there was much reason to worry about thousands of ex-combatants swirling around on the streets with no future. Nobody believed that all the weapons were being turned in, and so there was palpable fear that ex-fighters would re-arm, go on "Operation Pay Yourself," and eventually restart the war.

The U.S., however, had readied a novel jobs program, modeled after the U.S. Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) implemented the idea rapidly, hiring tens of thousands of ex-fighters from all three armies, and mixing in some other Liberians who had never fought. They got $2 a day and were sent off throughout Liberia, fixing the roads they had mortared, the bridges they had just blown up, the health clinics they had burned down, and much more. Furthermore, by giving the ex-fighters something concrete to do, a job, and some hope, particularly until more UN-led reintegration programs could kick in, they were gradually co-opted, and the grip of their old chains of command further diminished.

Similar accounts could be given about programmatic and other measures taken to assure sustainment of momentum during rehabilitation, reintegration, and security sector reform (SSR) operations. Sustaining momentum is not just a nicety. Pauses are literally deadly.

5. Make the state's achieving a genuine monopoly of force a centerpiece of strategy

Long ago, Max Weber defined the state as, "a human community that claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory."[11] For many reasons, the nation-state of the 21st century is now under greater pressure as the world's primary form of social organization, including its ability to achieve and maintain a monopoly of force. Weber's definition and emphasis is even more important in the 21st century than it was when he wrote it. To normalize, or even just stabilize, the state must have a genuine monopoly of force in order to proceed along a number of critical trajectories leading to stability and eventual normality. Real security sets the stage for institutional capacity building, economic growth and development, societal acceptance and advancement, and is indispensable for the establishment of national sovereignty and legitimacy and all that that conveys.

Among the modern tools available to achieve that monopoly of force in complex situations are DDRR or DDR programs, SSR, cleaning up internal arms and munitions caches, and minimizing exogenous destabilizing interference. Of course, disarming any segment of the citizenry implies a solemn and perpetual obligation to protect those who are disarmed and, therefore, made defenseless. To be clear, the goal should be to disarm the entire citizenry and make the state free of militias of any sort. Of course, fanatics, religious or political, will rarely allow themselves to be disarmed and view perpetual warfare as their goal. For them, continuation of the struggle is success collectively, and martyrdom is success individually. There will likely be no DDR solutions for such groups. They may have to be eliminated, as part of achieving the state's monopoly of force.

It does not follow, however, as is often voiced, that the last insurgent has to be put out of action before any DDR is possible. That is

an unfortunate example of linear thinking. DDR may well be possible in more benign parts of a state where the population can be protected. In fact, how likely is identifying and neutralizing remaining insurgents going to be if everyone is allowed to retain arms?

In that regard, a particularly irritating and common assertion, from Bosnia to Afghanistan, is that disarmament of the populace is impossible because the people have a long history and culture of bearing arms that precludes any such action. In the 21st century, this usually translates into the populace having an inalienable right to own for their "protection" one or more AK-47 rifles. Such argumentation is specious. The AK-47 is not some sort of hunting rifle or defensive weapon. It is history's most prolific assault rifle, an inexpensive and deadly firearm. It is a conventional weapon of mass destruction. There is no lengthy history of the AK-47. It was developed in the Soviet Union by Mikhail Kalashnikov around the end of World War II. In other words, it was invented within living memory.

What happens to lasting stability when the state does not achieve and retain a genuine monopoly of force? Generally, the failure to achieve that monopoly enormously complicates the achievement of stability and normality in countless ways. Examples abound, but, for the sake of illustration, consider Iraq. By late 2007 there had been heroic progress against hard-core extremists and insurgents in Iraq, yet today quite clearly the Iraqi state still does not have a monopoly of force. That is true not only because insurgency continues, and is much exacerbated by the emergence of the Islamic State in recent months, but also because there were no significant DDR programs in Iraq, and little if any limitation on incoming weapons from abroad.

So, where does that leave SSR and other fronts where momentum has to be created and maintained? How does a policeman tell people to move their cars out of the middle of the road when they likely have AK-47s and rocket-propelled grenades? How can there be sustainable and widespread development and institution building when armed, ethnically based militias are intact, extorting and menacing? How does government have enough political cohesion and legitimacy under such circumstances to make key but tough decisions, illustrated so dramatically by the strained Iraqi internal debate on a long-term U.S. military presence, which ultimately led to the departure of U.S. troops, and the recent descent into renewed conflict? How do you prevent external

Afrah, an Iraqi Army basic trainee, yells "clear" to let trainers know she is finished clearing her AK-47 assault rifle during live weapons training at the Jordanian Royal Military Academy, Jordan, during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

meddling from countries like Iran when guns and more advanced weaponry are pumped regularly across borders, jeopardizing Iraq's achievement of a monopoly of force and its sovereignty? What are the prospects for political institutions and the rule of law mediating and controlling multi-ethnic Iraq, when there has been no significant disarmament of the populace?

Tactically, the difficult fight against hardcore extremists, or insurgents, might suggest supporting or arming vigilante militias or ethnic groups, as has been done in some countries. But if done, what are the strategic, longer-term trade-offs involved, that is, for achieving national cohesion in such loyalty-shifting societies, which often have not achieved orderly successions of power? Does building up ethnically based armies or police forces really enhance long-term stability and national identity, even if they initially help suppress insurgents? Good guns are really hard to get back or control once they are passed out. Remember what happened when the Soviet Union collapsed. Weapons from its impoverished military-industrial complex were subsequently sold worldwide. Even in just causes, consider how hard it is going to be to retrieve the weaponry of Libya, including huge stockpiles "liberated" from Muammar Gaddafi's depots. Whole arsenals have already found their way to global arms markets. The coup in Mali, fueled by Libyan weaponry, was just the beginning.

Outside countries should think harder before taking extreme actions that support shorter-term objectives, such as those of counterinsurgency, but, in turn, make the longer-term mission of attaining sustainable peace, legitimacy, state sovereignty and normalization much tougher and more complex to achieve—or simply impossible. Monopoly of force is a bridge to the future, and it must be fairly complete, strong, and lasting.

6. Design sequencing with "boots on the ground"

In the words of Woody Allen, "Ninety per cent of life is just showing up."[12] Designing a good game plan while leading from afar is much more difficult, and usually there is no valid reason in the 21st century for trying to do so. Such an observation probably seems like nothing more than common sense, which indeed it is. Surprisingly, however, trying to design and run operations "long distance" is still common. Look, for example, at NATO in Afghanistan, which was so reluctant to adopt a command forward approach. Despite the efforts of so many brilliant electronic innovators and the fervor of younger generations for computers of all sorts, virtual reality will never beat being there.

7. Internationalize the problem whenever possible

A multitude of new problems is emerging in the 21st century, with not enough old ones having been put to rest. In fact, this backlog of unresolved situations and issues should be one of the major concerns of this era. Problems are deferred or warehoused, almost frozen, but few are resolved or age well over time. For example, the rapid growth of multilateral peacekeeping operations is worrisome, with many of them existing for many years.[13]

At least 40 nation-states are deemed fragile or worse.[14] From just an economic perspective, the 21st century is proving to be a huge challenge for many countries, even the U.S. Meanwhile, the total costs of societal defense in modernity—of trying to protect nation-states from irregular warfare and terrorism,

weapons of mass destruction, cyber-attack, and a host of other internal political and economic challenges—are astronomical. Particularly for those many countries struggling to develop or those just trying to stabilize and protect themselves, the contemporary reality is that it is much easier to tear down than to build up.

In these days of problems growing like hydra's heads, with few of them dispatched permanently, better internationalization of complex situations should be sought whenever feasible. Certainly, more burden-sharing during this era of austerity is one strong reason to seek more multilateral approaches to new and old complex situations. Just as compelling, however, is the need to sustain the political will necessary to engage across so many problems simultaneously, and for increasingly longer periods. Having partners helps. For

example, Liberia was judged to be the worst place in the world in 2003 by The Economist.[15] Stopping the war and bringing Liberia back from these depths was a Herculean task, many years in duration, and is still continuing. It was accomplished by the coordinated involvement of many countries and organizations. An active International Contact Group for Liberia (ICGL) was led by the EC Commission and Ghana, as well as a World Bank-led donors group. Africans provided much of the political muscle, including leadership of the formal peace process and involvement of several heads of state. A very significant role was played by West Africa's regional group, ECOWAS, and its vanguard peacekeeper deployment into Liberia (i.e., ECOMIL). Liberia's new government and non-governmental organizations, as well as former

A UN plane taxis at Roberts International Airport in Liberia to assist relief effort.

LCPL NATHAN E. EASON, U.S. Marine Corp

combatants and the general population, can also share in the near-miracle of Liberia's escape from hell and ongoing recovery. And, finally, the UN, and especially its mission in Liberia (UNMIL), provided an indispensable follow-on peacekeeping force, which was also the centerpiece and main organizer of many sustained post-conflict operations. The UN and UNMIL in particular deserve a lot of credit for giving Liberia the chance to emerge as potentially one of the greatest turnaround stories of this century.

The U.S., of course, played a role, providing more resources than any other single country, and occasionally took the lead in the peace process. The point here, however, is that this success was not a U.S. unilateral operation. Moreover, had it been only a unilateral effort, success would have been unlikely. The U.S., after all, was deeply engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the idea that the U.S. would have pulled Liberia up by itself, especially at that time, is far-fetched. In sum, the steady political will and shared leadership emanating from a number of countries, groups, and individuals, foreign and indigenous, all on behalf of Liberia, have proven to be synergistic, sustainable, and even inspirational.

Of course, every case is different, and often there will be no way to emulate the multilateral winning approach on Liberia. In particular, navigating the UN is politically tricky. Even when successfully done, the UN is often slow to act. It also rarely forces peace on the ground, and sometimes barely maintains it. There will likely be future circumstances when the U.S. must act without UN support or approbation, but, even then, experience suggests recruiting as many allies, coalition partners, and others as possible when undertaking such future endeavors.

8. Achieve and assess local buy-in

One of the main lessons of the Vietnam War was the importance of winning, as it was called then, "hearts and minds." Somewhat paradoxically, as argued previously, it is also important not to lose momentum and become paralyzed awaiting impossible local consensus on what has to be done. Often there is no way to completely resolve the inherent tension between achieving local buy-in and retaining reasonable momentum and control of events. Both are critical elements of strategy creation and both must be weighed over and over again. In some cases, local buy-in initially may have to be given less emphasis but, even so, must be kept carefully in mind from the beginning.

In fact, assessing the potential for local buy-in should be done carefully before becoming involved. No amount of training and equipping of local forces will succeed without spiritual local buy-in. Indigenous forces, institutions, and the population must be willing to fight for their cause while respecting human rights. Sincere, not rented, local partners are indispensable. If at any time sufficient local buy-in is judged impossible to achieve, prudence suggests avoiding entanglement or speedy withdrawal.

What to do in order to improve local buy-in will always vary depending on the situation. In general, populations tend to support those that offer them the best alternative. Keeping inflated expectations in check, and meeting promises that are made, also encourages local buy-in.

9. Create jobs, jobs, jobs

Being an insurgent is a job. If you are a teenager, poking at dirt with a stick and someone

offers you an AK-47—that's an upgrade! A young insurgent can then loot the things he has dreamed of, often raping and pillaging without bounds. Poverty breeds insurgency. And, even after peace is made, unemployed ex-fighters are like living nitroglycerin.

According to the Central Intelligence Agency, after more than a decade of Western military and civilian presence, and hundreds of billions of dollars invested, Afghanistan's roughly 40-percent unemployment rate in 2006 moved only slightly to about 35 percent by 2010.[16] The failure to sufficiently improve employment in Afghanistan amounts to a strategic error. Amazingly, the labor pool for the Taliban and others to cheaply recruit insurgents is still intact. Even in complex situations where there is no insurgency, economic factors, especially high unemployment, often are the crux of the problem, or part of it. Significant job creation can do a lot to resolve rather than warehouse serious societal differences, as the international financial institutions know well. Early multilateral efforts in this area can result in cost-effective conflict prevention.

10. Worry about the rule of law, fight impunity and corruption, and build honest policing capacity

These interrelated problems are usually the most enduring ones but are absolutely essential to address. Often, they are swept under the rug in order to achieve local cooperation on shorter term or counterinsurgency objectives.

But, how can successful SSR be done within the framework of a horribly venal government? How long will trained police stay honest in that environment? Will newly created armies stay loyal when their salaries are skimmed or when they see their own government officials stealing rapaciously?

The international community had to deal dramatically with these issues in Liberia—a deep sea of corruption by the end of the rule of Charles Taylor in 2003. Yet, rather than ignore this host of extreme corruption and rule-of-law problems, a program of de-toxification was created to start to free Liberia from its kleptocratic binging. The heart of the effort was known as the Government Economic Management and Assistance Program (GEMAP). GEMAP was a tough, externally led, dual signature financial control system that tracked Liberia's resources and began the process of making reasonably certain that Liberia's income would be spent on Liberians, not stolen. As testament to the program's efficacy, the elected government of Liberia volitionally decided to retain the GEMAP system for years after it came to power in 2006 in order to facilitate greater financial transparency.

Of course, corruption anywhere in the world is only ameliorated, not eliminated. Important cultural differences and sensitivities must be kept in mind. Generally, however, corruption complicates and deepens the entire range of stabilization problems, whereas progress against corruption is welcomed by most and helps make strategic progress more feasible across-the-board. In sum, dealing with corruption, building rule-of-law institutions, including honest policing capacity, and attacking impunity are all extremely important for lasting strategic success. These areas must not be avoided, but included, in strategy creation and throughout operations on the ground. Regarding corruption as hopelessly endemic is a common and gutless excuse for inaction, which allows the cancer of corruption to weave

its way throughout the entire body of a strategy and eventually kill it.

Unfortunately, it must be noted that most of the parliaments of the world do not want to fund SSR, including reforming police forces needed to help address rampant local corruption. The constituents of many elected Western officials do not like to have funds spent on creating foreign armies or police forces. There is no easy answer to this political problem.

11. Show me the money

Leaders have the responsibility to punch away vigorously in order to try to get enough resources to design programs that can actually be executed and culminate in strategic success. In particular, leaders in the field should be careful not to allow piecemeal budgeting from afar to create pseudo-strategy on the ground. Sound strategy can create budgets, but budgets alone can never create sound strategy.

Plans that can never be resourced are worse than nothing at all because they take attention away from that which is possible. Particularly in these austere times, determination of what is realistically needed for success should be made initially, and periodically thereafter. If nothing like the proper means is going to be provided for addressing a complex situation, it is likely a mistake to become involved or to stay engaged.

Conclusion

In sum, these 11 elements of strategy creation for complex situations are not meant to be inclusive of all factors to be considered. For example, the matter of achieving internal whole-of government collaboration is also critical. So is the process of selecting exceptional leaders for development and implementation of tailored strategies, especially those

able to lead on the ground. These issues, however, deserve their own separate and more complete treatments. Although more elements could obviously be added, it is hoped that those facing new complex situations in the future will find this set of elements useful for strategy creation.

The unique character of complex situations defies a single cookie-cutter approach, resists uniform sequencing, cannot be dealt with linearly, is not always predictably responsive to logical approaches, and often requires strategy adaptation or even reversal in midstream. These differing contexts often make direct transference of doctrine and past experience difficult, but new strategic conceptualization will be greatly enhanced by appreciation of previous lessons learned. Many factors must be considered when formulating multi-pronged successful strategies that anticipate and endure inevitable change. The quality of the art of strategy creation for complex situations will depend upon having creative, trained leaders and advisers. Those who can visualize holistically, implement tenaciously, adapt rapidly to the new, while drawing upon the old, will fare best.

The elements of strategy creation that have been suggested, like paint colors, should receive careful consideration and blend. Even they, however, cannot capture the universe of possibilities. The composition of each new, successful strategy will be a unique combination and a work of art. PRISM

NOTES

[1] The CogNexus Institute posts on its website, http://cognexus.org/id42.htm, a typical definition of a wicked problem: "A wicked problem is one for which each attempt to create a solution changes the

understanding of the problem. Wicked problems cannot be solved in a traditional linear fashion, because the problem definition evolves as new possible solutions are considered and/or implemented. The term was originally coined by Horst Rittel. Wicked problems always occur in a social context—the wickedness of the problem reflects the diversity among the stakeholders in the problem.

2   See Civil Power in Irregular Conflict, edited by Kramer, Dempsey, Gregoire, and Merrill, CNA, January 12, 2010.

3   In mid-2003 the West African group of countries, known as ECOWAS, initially deployed into Liberia small vanguard units as part of its "ECOMIL" force. ECOMIL played a key role in stopping the fighting and helped set the stage for the departure of then-President of Liberia, Charles Taylor. A few months later, United Nations peacekeepers arrived to further stabilize Liberia. Years earlier, ECOWAS deployed a force into Liberia known as "ECOMOG," which quickly became a combatant party. In 2003, had ECOMIL become a combatant party, the fighting likely would have continued indefinitely as a four-way struggle—that is, the forces of Charles Taylor, the fighters from two separate rebel armies (i.e. LURD and MODEL), and ECOMIL.

4   The QDR in Perspective: Meeting America's National Security Needs in the 21st Century: Final Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel, Stephen J. Hadley, William J. Perry, et al. United States Institute of Peace, page 36.

5   See David J. Snowden and Mary E. Boone, "A Leader's Framework for Decision Making," Harvard Business Review (November 2007). The extrapolation of this work to complex stabilization situations has been made by the author, based upon earlier experiences, and does not necessarily represent the views of Drs. Snowden and Boone.

6   See Steven Goldsmith and William D. Eggers, Governing by Network, (Washington, DC: The Bookings Institution Press, 2004). The extrapolation of this work to complex stabilization situations has been made by the author, based upon earlier experiences, and does not necessarily represent the views of Messrs. Goldsmith and Eggers.

7   The original quotation is probably: "The candle is not worth the game." This may be an old French saying about the merits of playing a card game by candlelight.

8   For an eyewitness account, see Blaney and Gfoeller, "Lessons from the Failure of Perestroika,"

Congressional Quarterly, Volume 108, Number 3, pp. 481-496. 1993.

9   The initial conscription for the Army of the Potomac was just three months, which reflected the widely shared expectation that the Civil War (1861-1865) would not last long. In the early days of Vietnam, the prevailing Washington view was that it would take only a matter of months for the U.S. to win the war.

10   See Interim Governments Institutional Bridges to Peace and Democracy, edited by Guttieri and Piombo, United States Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, 2007.

11   See: Weber, Max, "Politics as a Vocation," From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology. Hans Heinrich Gerth and C. Wright Mills, editors and translators (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p.77.

12   Although President George H.W. Bush used this same quotation as well, Allen's exact words to columnist William Safire may have been "Ninety percent of success is showing up."

13   A good place to see the impressive totality of ongoing "Multilateral Peace Operation Deployments" is the map of them produced by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute at http://www.sipri.org.

14   See, for example, Ensuring Fragile States are not Left Behind, Summary Report—February 2010, The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Figure 2A, page 3.

15   "The World's Worst: Liberia ," The World in 2003, report published by The Economist, November 2002.

16   CIA World Factbook, accurate as of February 19, 2010.

Photos

Page 34 photo by Bettman/CORBIS. 1968. *U.S. Marine Congregate in back of tank, on residential street, which fires over an outer wall of the citadel.* From https://www.flickr.com/photos/97930879@N02/9837092363/ licensed under the Creative Commons **Attribution 2.0 Generic** license. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/. Photo reproduced unaltered.