

COUNTERTERRORISM AND COUNTERINSURGENCY INITIATIVE

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OVERVIEW

Prominent analysts and commentators have claimed that the fight against Islamist terrorism is a global conflict that merits the designation of World War IV. This is overwrought. To be sure, Islamist terrorist groups such as al Qaeda and some of its affiliates are intent on doing massive violence to the United States and American interests overseas. Yet while al Qaeda and its associated groups harbor grand ambitions, their abilities are limited—a threat that is not remotely comparable to the one the U.S. and the West in general faced from the Nazis and Soviets.

Nevertheless, Islamist extremism represents an important national security threat, as the 9/11 attacks show, and these groups must be contained and eventually eliminated. What is lacking, however, is a comprehensive, sustainable, and effective strategy for doing that. The Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency Initiative will seek to fill that gap by first expanding the stream of open-source threat and policy analysis and second, based on that analysis, developing a new strategic concept to replace the counterproductive ‘global war on terror’ framework..

CORE CONCEPTS

Through a program of original research and publication, CCI seeks to build a new consensus around these core ideas and the specific strategies they suggest. The Initiative will produce a series of op-eds, working papers and issue briefs on the following concepts:

Do no harm. Over time, al Qaeda and its affiliates’ strategic weaknesses mean that many terrorist/insurgent groups should eventually self-destruct. But some of the actions of the United States have had the effect of strengthening the Islamist movement and its affiliates. More broadly, counterterrorism policy has been too heavily militarized. Greater investments in the training, equipping and motivating of reliable local partners is urgently required.

Disaggregate the enemy. The U.S. should not fall into the trap of basing our policies on the notion that there is a monolithic global Islamist militant movement united against us. In fact, there are disparate local terrorist groups and insurgencies that are particular to each country and are amenable to different policy fixes. We should be wary of conflating the identities and motives of our adversaries.

Lower the temperature in the Muslim world. Good-faith, intensive efforts are necessary to resolve conflicts such as Kashmir and Israel/Palestine that serve as grievances and/or training grounds for militants. Finding new approaches to flashpoint issues such as the prison camp at Guantanamo and the CIA’s rendition program is essential.

Use all the tools. We will need to use the right combination of policy tools in the right context to achieve

the preceding goals. This will mean using counterinsurgency tactics, which emphasize political and economic approaches over military force, reviving failed states and rebuilding after conflict, as well as counterterrorism approaches. As a general rule, the ‘global war on terror’ is better conceived of as a global counterinsurgency campaign, which typically involves a 20% military approach and an 80% “softer” approach that uses other levers and incentives.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

To study these concepts, CCI will engage in three primary activities:

Evidence-based threat and policy analysis. Government analysis about terrorism is shrouded in classification and suffers from a history of inaccuracies, selective leaks, and sometimes, misinformation. Open-source analysis, where it exists, is widely decentralized. CCI is developing a new stream of open-source, evidence-based threat and policy analysis, data-rich and steeped in analytic rigor—to provide an independent source of publicly available information on the nature of the threat, or a component of the threat.

Offering policy alternatives. Where CCI analysis determines that there is a gap between the threat and policy, CCI will aim to close that gap. Policy alternatives will be generated at all four levels of policy, from the tactical to the operational, from the strategic to the public narrative.

Reframing the strategic narrative. Immediately after 9/11, the United States government said that we are now engaged in a global war on terror. Now, the case for a ‘global war on terror’ is considerably weakened and increasingly counterproductive. CCI will examine this question in a larger strategic context, examine the linkages between terrorism and other policy issues, such as energy policy, economic development, democratization, regional politics, etc., and evaluate the effectiveness and value of framing U.S. counterterrorism and counterinsurgency efforts as a ‘global war on terror.’

HIGH-PROFILE CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

In addition to developing new thinking around each of these areas, the Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency Initiative will organize several large-scale national policy conferences each year, along with a robust roster of smaller salon dinners and traditional public policy events.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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