USE OF MILITARY POWER: LESSONS FROM A DECADE OF WAR

By Michael Kofman
Can the employment of military power achieve desired political ends?
The long decade of war

Source: US Department of Defense, FY 2014 Budget Request, April 2013

Defense budget does not include nuclear weapons related activities of the Department of Energy, which is normally separate from base defense budget.
Early on: complete overmatch
What happened in Iraq?

21 days dealing with this

7 years dealing with this
How much we enjoyed expeditionary counterinsurgency and stability operations 2001-2015
Result: no more please
Our experience during the decade of war

Rapid military success/false sense of accomplishment

Critical assumptions proven wrong

Slog it out as things deteriorate

Adapt force and tactics, localize before political will and public support runs out

Initial mistakes make political objectives unachievable—new leadership accepts partial gains to exit war
What does this look like on the ground?

- Unexpected deterioration of security environment
  - “Mission Accomplished”
- Ineffectual and underfunded response
  - “Nationbuilding-lite”
- Military and intelligence surge to turn around situation
  - “Double Down”
- Long lasting political transformation traded for stable security environment
  - “Good Enough”
- Untimely departure leaving unsustainable political/security environment
Course of counterinsurgency and stability operations

Afghanistan

- Quick mil victory 2001-2002
- Steady Deterioration 2002-2007
- Surge 2009-2012
- Stabilization and departure? 2012-2015

Iraq

- Quick mil victory 2003
- Rapid Deterioration 2003-2006
- Surge 2007-2009
- Stabilization and departure 2010-2011
- Return 2014-?
Conflict Costs

**Iraq**
- $1.7 trillion ~
- 4,488 personnel killed
- 32,223 wounded
- 134,000 civilians killed
- 2.8 million refugees and IDPs

**Afghanistan**
- $1 trillion ~
- 2,360 personnel killed
- 12,309 wounded
- 26,000 civilians killed
- 3.7 million refugees and IDPs
Counterinsurgency is an ugly business

- 2003 Abu Ghraib
- 2005 Haditha massacre
- 2007 Nisour square shooting
- 2012 Panjwai massacre
How did we get here from rapid dominance?
Resignation?

- “We shouldn’t spend too much time trying to figure out how to do this sort of thing better, because we’re never going to do it well and it will rarely be vital to our overall security.

- Instead, we ought to work harder on developing an approach to the world that minimizes the risk of getting ourselves into this kind of war again.” – Stephen M. Walt
Libya Intervention 2011 – avoiding all fears

- Do the right thing without owning the problem

- Hailed as model for intervention (R2P)

- Low cost ~ $1 bil (nothing ventured)

- Result: civil war, anarchy, degeneration into militiastan with opportunities for ISIS
The shadow war

- Suppression and disruption need not a strategy
- CT on steroids
Military Power in Context

Am I alone out here?
DIME – the concept

- Diplomacy
- Information
- Military
- Economics
How we exercise DIME in the US

Military

Diplomacy

Information

Economics
More realistic depiction of unity of effort - without unity of command
We can make DIME work
(but only if prospects for use of force are terrible)

- Syria 2013
- Ukraine 2014
- Iran 2015
The changing security environment

Russian forces during the annexation of Crimea (2014)
Meanwhile in China
And Russia
Competing powers leverage their military for coercion

Russian Tu-95 strategic bomber
Allies – changing the formula

Japan’s Izumo Helicarrier
Future conflicts

“We know with a sad certainty that war has a healthy future. What we do not know with confidence are the forms that warfare will take.”
- Colin S. Gray, SSI
The future

Popular culture tells us use of military power will be defined by technology
We think so too – Air/Sea Battle is the future (definitely no COIN)

Zumwalt DDG currently being constructed in Bath Ironworks, Maine
This keeps coming up
The return of history
Understanding the modern spectrum of conflict

Unconventional Warfare

- Gray Zone/Ambiguous Conflict
- Irregular Warfare/Terrorism
- Hybrid
- Limited Conventional Warfare
- Theater Conventional Warfare

Forthcoming work by Frank Hoffman
The debate

When, How and Why should we use force knowing what we know today? - guy with powerpoint clicker
Powell/Weinberger (focused on conditions)

- **When:**
  - Force as last resort
  - Attainable objective (risk analysis done)
  - Plausible exit strategy
  - Public & International support

- **Why:**
  - Vital national interest

- **How:**
  - Massive force – large deployment
  - Set up a ‘no lose’ scenario
Rumsfeld/Humanitarian Interventionists (focused on type of operation)

- **When:**
  - Conditions less important than will and the kind of operation
  - Exit strategy = easy in easy out
  - International support a plus, but not a requirement
  - Little risk, outcome self-sorting

- **Why:**
  - Preemptive, proactive, or protective
  - Limited objectives

- **How:**
  - Minimum land force, maximum firepower
  - Information and air driven warfare (force multipliers)
  - Rapid dominance
The fault is not in our stars

- Unreasonable political and public expectations for quick wins at low cost
- An overly simplistic grasp about the application of blunt military power and what it will supposedly achieve
- Naïve views of both adversaries and context for conflict

-Frank Hoffman, NDU
Where we are today

- U.S. employment of military power no longer perceived as effective, competent, or a positive force for good
- The world is less permissive for the misuse of military power – we have fewer choices, fewer assets, but more challenges
- U.S. military dominance across domains is diminishing against peers and of low effectiveness in current spectrum of conflicts
Easy answers for application of military power today versus the spectrum of conflicts we face

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Questions?