



**It Ain't Over Till it's Over:**

# WHAT TO DO WHEN COMBAT ENDS

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**T**O EVERYTHING, THERE IS A SEASON. Even in war, there eventually comes a time when the violence ends. Conventional wisdom holds that the absence of so-called “kinetics” makes life less complicated. That facile conclusion may brief well, but in reality we have learned that things become much more complex. The rebuilding of another country’s governing landscape is a costly, comprehensive undertaking that can be a financial and political drain.<sup>1</sup> Preserving the peace to secure enduring success requires implementing four post-conflict reconstruction pillars: security, justice and reconciliation, social and economic well being, and governance and participation.<sup>2</sup> In addition to those four pillars, a victorious nation-state must develop and execute a post-combat operations plan that addresses Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and garners public support at home and abroad.

## Security

Security is of vital importance. Security is the creation of a safe and secure environment with legitimate, effective security institutions.<sup>3</sup> It is a tactical task, the backbone of a military operation, and can have immense strategic implications with good and bad consequences. Nonetheless, security is necessary for the effective coordination of reconstruction activities in a post-combat environment. Host nations, nongovernmental organizations, and even the U.S. State Department will not risk placing individuals in an unstable and nonsecure work environment in the current theater of operations in Southwest Asia. From this perspective, having enough security is crucial; in its absence few U.S. civilians are willing to do the complex tasks of nation building that the military cannot accomplish. The greatest risk associated with a lack of security is the prospect of needlessly sacrificing that which the armed forces have fought and suffered for by allowing the threat to reenter secure areas.

Once combat operations finally end in our current military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. forces in strategically placed outposts or “joint bases” will conduct joint border patrol and surveillance operations with host-nation forces to limit, if not eliminate, enemy infiltrations. American forces should assume a more advisory or technical support role, and not repeatedly lead tactical missions. Our technological advantage, coupled with our battlefield experience, will help the host nation provide sustainable security for its citizens. Once the nation is adept at doing so, the essential task of addressing

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the root causes of hostilities and disenfranchisement can and should occur.

## Justice and Reconciliation

This leads us to the next pillar of justice and reconciliation, the host-nation's attempts to redress past abuses through mechanisms to resolve grievances. As in the past, American resources and efforts will have to be used to help reconcile opposing factions. In these instances, the host nation must not confine its efforts to settling the superficial issues, but should commit, word and deed, to purposefully addressing the long-term issues at the heart of social discontent. America must use all its instruments of national power to help accomplish this.

The U.S. military can conduct impartial and professional commissions and tribunals to recommend viable courses of action to the host nation for bringing justice to aggrieved parties. Prominent figures from U.S. law schools and other institutions of higher learning should augment the military commissions and tribunals to help create a new, impartial legal system.<sup>4</sup> American colleges and universities that specialize in the social sciences might provide experts that could work with the military on reconciliation issues. The use of the military as the nucleus for these auxiliary bodies takes advantage of military planning techniques, which can add value to social development projects.

In any area of combat, some residents will flee and take refuge in another country. America, along with the host nation, can enhance the prospects of successful reconciliation by making an extraordinary effort to repatriate such refugees.<sup>5</sup> Their return home is similar to the rainy season's return to a parched earth. Those who have fled their native land but want to return home represent the promise of tomorrow. The use of military transport can facilitate and expedite their return. The prospects for enduring peace are threatened when displaced people have no viable prospects for returning home; their return is critical, not only to themselves, but to host-nation institutions, post-combat operations, and justice and reconciliation.

## Social and Economic Well-Being

Of equal importance is the third pillar, social and economic well-being achieved through providing

emergency relief and the restoration of essential services like health care and education, and U.S. private sector involvement that energizes trade.<sup>6</sup> Tax credits could help secure U.S. corporate participation in reconstruction activities that spur economic well-being in a post-conflict environment. The United States should actively seek the help of U.S. corporations in developing reconstruction capacities. The government should give private corporations the opportunity to accomplish tasks efficiently and reward their efforts, but it should ensure that host-nation contractors execute most reconstruction efforts, not Americans.

Another noteworthy effort may be to engage the "native sons and daughters" of the host nation.<sup>7</sup> The U.S. government should recruit and employ skilled workers in reconstruction activities, not just as "window dressing," but in prominent leadership positions with the autonomy and authority to lead and, once they are in position, help them give people long-term hope by establishing a jobs program.<sup>8</sup>

## Governance and Participation

The final pillar addresses governance and participation: the strengthening of public-sector management and administration by promoting participation in civil society.<sup>9</sup> Of course, any reconstruction effort that fails to take a tough stance against corruption is bound to fail. There is a need for transparency in all governmental transactions because governance and participation decrease when corruption rises. To safeguard either a new or reconstituted government from corruption, the United States should create a corruption task force composed of American and host-nation officials responsible for setting moral, ethical, and legal standards. Such a cell should stay in existence for at least seven years.<sup>10</sup> The new government must allow all leaders in society to participate on the task force. Both the host nation and the United States must establish safeguards to protect minorities, and mechanisms and institutions to enforce those safeguards.<sup>11</sup>

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The post-conflict government must also have indigenous legitimacy.<sup>12</sup> Legitimacy cannot be propped up by American money, nor can the country be governed by U.S. surrogates. The government must reflect the culture and society of the population it seeks to manage. The host-nation's citizens must see the new government as being truly reflective of them in appearance, mannerisms, and thinking. Army civil affairs units need to work with existing institutions to create viable governing institutions.<sup>13</sup>

After conflict has ended, the United States should encourage nations in the neighboring regions to participate in nation-building efforts. America made a concerted effort to assemble a military coalition. It must put forth an equal effort to recruit a nation-building coalition. This participation should not be an avenue for nations to come in and meddle with the revitalization of the host nation, but a way to produce collaborative success stories.

Each of the pillars discussed previously are important considerations. Modern theorists have offered these prescriptions. We should use them in a consistent and coordinated manner moving from one opportunity to the next. There is room for variance, as no two situations are going to be the same. Recent events in Iraq and Afghanistan reveal to us that it takes time to implement these pillars: success does not and will not come overnight. Time is a requirement that we should not minimize or take for granted. Other requirements that, to date, have gotten little traction in current literature on the topic of post-conflict operations are the holistic needs of the individual and winning the war of ideas.

## Holistic Needs

We should not write off the notion of addressing the holistic needs of an individual as a “touchy-feely” approach to finishing off the (military) job. The impact of a military defeat on the mental disposition of a community or society that suffers such a trauma has a lasting effect on its victims. We must recognize that combat's impact on society can cause us to lose all the gains we achieved through operations. Our acknowledgment that combatants and noncombatants alike have to adjust to a different reality in a post-conflict environment helps ensure we have lasting success and cessation of hostilities. The four pillars we espouse are only as good as their

***The four pillars we espouse are only as good as their impact on other people's perception...***

impact on other people's perception that their basic needs are satisfied, along lines similar to Maslow's hierarchy of needs.<sup>14</sup> To the degree that we can, we should design and implement post-combat operations to allow all the elements of national power to help the host-nation's citizens achieve their true potential. Education must become a priority in a society that is benefitting from our reconstruction efforts. America could help institute or shore up educational programs within the country.<sup>15</sup>

## Winning the War of Ideas

Transitioning government oversight from U.S. agencies to an international body allows the host nation to implement culturally based strategies, programs, and activities without American influence.<sup>16</sup> Once combat operations have ceased, there should be minimal opportunities for one to conclude that America is suppressing the country's autonomy. The best way to accomplish this is to win the war of ideas.

Having nations with stable, democratic governments are extremely vital to international security.



U.S. Army, SPC Richard Dai Vecchio

**SGT Boomer Jones looks for his next checkpoint in Sadr Yusufiyah, Iraq, 13 July 2008.**

This condition existed in post-war Japan and Germany.<sup>17</sup> America must explicitly, and repeatedly, articulate why post-conflict activities are important not just in light of American interests, but international ones as well. America must use its soft power to consistently communicate what we are attempting to accomplish. This message, directed towards different audiences, must be consistent and we must communicate it in a manner that various target audiences can understand. Post-combat activities require a robust, comprehensive communications campaign that is ever-evolving and designed to deliberately shape public opinion.

Stories aired on the Armed Forces Network should be broadcast to other places, both stateside and abroad. People from all walks of life and in different parts of the world need to see consistent images of American armed forces doing good things for people and communities. The U.S. government should buy airtime in major media markets of the United States and in international markets to present some of the good news that comes out of the Armed Forces Network's production house. Failure to do this is a missed opportunity.

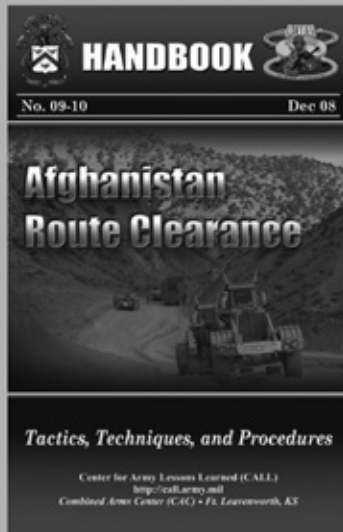
The admonition to heed from what we are currently facing in Iraq and Afghanistan is that post-combat preparation and planning is just as critical as pre-combat preparation and planning. **MR**

#### NOTES

1. Minxin Pei, "Lessons of the Past," *Foreign Policy*, July-August 2003, 52.
2. *Play to Win: Final Report of the Bi-partisan Commission on Post-Conflict Reconstruction* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Association of the U.S. Army, 2003), 2.
3. John J. Hamre and Gordon R. Sullivan, "Toward Postconflict Reconstruction," *The Washington Quarterly* 25 (Autumn 2002): 91.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Conrad C. Crane and W. Andrew Terrill, "Reconstructing Iraq: Insights, Challenges, and Missions for Military Forces in a Post-Conflict Scenario" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2002): 44.
6. Johanna Mendelson Foreman, "Achieving Socioeconomic Well-Being in Post-conflict Settings," *The Washington Quarterly* 25 (Autumn 2002): 126.
7. "Play to Win: Final Report of the bi-partisan Commission on Post-Conflict Reconstruction," 12.
8. Crane and Terrill, 44.
9. *Ibid.*, 92.
10. Karin von Hippel, "Democracy by Force: A Renewed Commitment to Nation Building," *Washington Quarterly* (Winter 2000): 107.
11. *Ibid.*, 109.
12. Pei, 53.
13. Clark and Terrill, 48.
14. Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper, 1954), 22. Maslow contends that all of us possess five levels of needs. Those levels are: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. His theory holds that needs must be met in sequential order, from lowest to highest. Once an individual attains one level, the needs of the lower level will no longer be prioritized. If a lower need is no longer being met, a person will temporarily re-prioritize those needs by focusing attention on the unfulfilled needs.
15. Crane and Terrill, 44.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Karin von Hippel, "Democracy by Force: A Renewed Commitment to Nation Building," *Washington Quarterly* (Winter 2000): 103.

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