

Major General Paul Eaton

WHAT DO A LEADER'S OPERATIONS TELL YOU ABOUT HIS STRATEGY?

Chairman Snyder, Ranking Member Wittman, members of the subcommittee, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for the invitation to join you today to discuss a topic that is at once very important to the Nation and is very personal to the thousands of families who send their Soldiers and Marines to prosecute the Nation's wars. To put it into a context, over 200,000 American families wake up and look outside to see if there is a government vehicle with the worst news possible. Every day. So I support this Administration's prudent review of our options in Afghanistan.

It may be best today to be more Socratic than didactic. Detailed analysis and answers to your requests for information are the purview of the Executive Branch, over which you have oversight. I want to suggest to you a number of questions of both operations and strategy which you should be asking, and which I hope and believe the White House is asking during the Administration's review.

Andrew Bacevich, a retired Army Colonel, now Professor of International Relations at Boston University and Author of The Limits of Power wrote for Harper's Magazine this month, "Among Democrats and Republicans alike, with few exceptions, Afghanistan's importance is simply assumed – much in the way fifty years ago otherwise intelligent people simply assumed that the United States had a vital interest in ensuring the survival of South Vietnam. Today, as then, the assumption does not stand up to even casual scrutiny."

So before we begin the debate about numbers of Soldiers and Marines in Afghanistan and subsequent impact on mission there and our mission in Iraq, it would be helpful to answer the questions, "Why do we continue operations in Afghanistan?" or "What do we want Afghanistan to look like in 'X' years?" or "What differentiates Afghanistan from Yemen or Somalia

or Sudan or any other failed or failing states capable of harboring al Qaeda (if al Qaeda is in fact part of the mission)?”

The mission statement will inform the commander’s intent, from which the real campaign plan will be known. If you don’t know where you are going any road will get you there.

The Administration has to answer the question ‘why’ before it should answer the ‘how’.

The primary rationale I can see to continue in Afghanistan is 60 or so nuclear weapons in Pakistan, the link to regional stability, and the extremist groups operating there. There is an argument, unfortunately harkening back to Vietnam era domino theory, that as goes Afghanistan and its internal fight against extremists, so goes Pakistan. I will leave the answer to the ‘why’ to the experts.

So if we are convinced that there is a satisfactory answer to the why, then the ‘how’ is informed by the answer to the second question, “What do we want Afghanistan to look like in ‘X’ years?” If we are interested in regional stability, then we are talking about counter-insurgency(COIN) vice counter-terrorism. And since we cannot generate the doctrinal 600,000 + troops to take a COIN approach, we are now pursuing what Andrew Krepinevich calls the oil-spot approach – you do what you can, where you can with what you have. That oil-spot will create its own legacy and expand over time, a security zone creating its own prosperity zone. The United States cannot generate the force structure to meet our own doctrinal requirements for COIN in Afghanistan driving us by default, to go to COIN light. Regardless the option our CINC picks, it will be COIN light.

Let’s review the components of US projection power. I am going to insist that there are three components, not just the obvious military one. As I told then-candidate Obama when I had the opportunity to meet with him more than a year ago, and he asked me what the Army wanted:

Senator, we want your Secretary of Agriculture to be at least as interested in the outcome in Afghanistan and Iraq, as is your Secretary of Defense.” The United States is in serious need of a review and revision of its National Security Architecture. We prosecuted the Cold War with the National Security Act of 1947 and did so brilliantly. The world, however, is now

very much different and we need to bring to bear the enormous talent our government can bring to the battlefield.

With your oversight responsibility, you can help us get there by always insisting that this or any Administration explain the total package. With that said, let me begin with the military piece.

Military:

1. What is your main effort – Afghanistan or Iraq? Once declared, when it comes to sending a limited resource, the main effort gets it. The economy of force gets an alternative.

-Two years ago, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mullen said before this committee, “In Afghanistan, we do what we can. In Iraq, we do what we must. Are we comfortable with a full reversal of that prioritization?”

2. What are the force providers – Army and Marine Corps – capable of providing at what level risk? 10K, 20K, 40K, 80K. Each troop level generates a level of risk to the force. Consider dwell time (Army is 24 months desired). The Chief of Staff Army or Commandant of the Marine Corps needs to respond with the level of risk based on number.

-Marine Corps Commandant Gen. James Conway has said that he cannot add more than 18,000 Marines to current levels in Afghanistan without cutting into their dwell time -- recovery time between deployments.

-The Army, for its part, seeks a balance of 24 months at home for every 12 months a soldier is deployed. The Army has said it can sustain this balance if it has no more than 10 brigades in Afghanistan and Iraq combined. But sending 40,000 or more new troops to Afghanistan will take us to 11 brigades in Afghanistan, and probably more, plus whatever level we retain in Iraq.

3. That risk includes operational and strategic reserves to respond to an in-theater and out theater requirement. Remember, Gen McChrystal’s job is to plan in an unconstrained manner. Adjudication occurs in the Departments.

-What are the contingencies elsewhere in the world that could change the strategic calculus? Specifically, what events in Iraq – and remember, Iraq has elections early next year – could slow or halt the flow of troops, surveillance equipment and other combat support assets from Iraq to Afghanistan?

4. What are the roles and missions of the additional troops? The Commander prioritizes. What do you get with 10K, 20K, 40K, 80K? Risk must get assessed at each troop level.
5. Tell us how you are to reach the necessary troop levels in ANA and ANP.
-Secretary Gates said in September that “the reality is that, even if the president did decide to approve additional combat forces going into Afghanistan, the first forces couldn’t arrive until January.”
6. What is the role of our NATO allies? Are we expecting the British, Canadians, Dutch, and others who have made significant commitments, and sustained significant losses, to keep troops on the ground? If so, how do their troops fit into our new strategy?

The outcome of all this is we can establish zones of security (and zones of prosperity) along Andrew Krepinevich’ oil-spot approach in ‘X’ urban areas. But, without the 600,000 troops that doctrine says would be needed to implement full COIN across the country, it appears that the Administration is headed for an approach that fuses a COIN approach in strategically-chosen urban regions with a less ambitious counter-terrorism approach in large segments of the country that are rural, less populous and of less strategic value.

Economic:

1. What is your master economic development plan? How does it connect to the hopes and priorities of Afghans?
2. How are you resourcing this plan? What and who are the executive branch players? Who is adjudicating challenges? What is the role of our NATO allies, Japan, India and other nations which have offered to assist?
3. Who is in charge?

Political:

1. Macro: What is your plan of engagement with Iran, Pakistan, India, China, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan? What will each provide and why?
2. Micro: If Karzai government is an issue, what is your back-up plan to establish the viable links with a political partner COIN demands. Bottom up (district – province – state) or top down – or both simultaneously? I understand we are doing a province by province and district by district

‘stress test’ to determine where we can anticipate some level of return on our soldier investment.

Bottom line, we have a great preoccupation with the numbers of Soldiers to deploy, without understanding the risks to the Nation this involves or the roles and missions our men and women will undertake.

Every pundit pontificates on 40K or some other number. And has a dogmatic support for his recommendation. We must ask the administration to explain the mission, what it wants Afghanistan to look like at the end of the day – and what the tradeoffs are for our military and our broader strategic goals.

I will end on a positive note from Richard Clarke in his 2008 book, Your Government Failed You:

“If we stop denigrating government and using its instruments as partisan punching bags, if we work in a bipartisan way to rebuild our institutions of National Security, your government will fail you much less; it could even make you proud once more.”