

Keynote Presentation: Elucidating Priorities: Analyses and Decisions

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Timothy Carney works as a consultant, having retired in 2000 after 32 years in the Foreign Service of the United States. In June 2007 he completed four months temporary employment with the Department of State as Coordinator for Economic Transition in Baghdad. He had served as the United States Charge d'Affaires to Haiti from August 2005 to February 2006 and then, for two months, as Interim Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) in the Office of the Secretary. On active service, he was Ambassador to Haiti from 1998-2000 and before that Ambassador to Sudan. He was earlier Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, and Director for Asian Affairs on the National Security Council Staff.

He worked in a number of international peacekeeping efforts after he witnessed the signing of the Paris Agreements by the Cambodian factions in 1991. He first became Director of Information and Education of the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC 1992-93); he next worked as a Special Political Advisor to the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in Somalia (UNOSOM II 1993), and then in South Africa (UNOMSA 1994) for the elections that ended apartheid. He was with the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) as Senior Adviser at the Ministry of Industry and Minerals in Baghdad (March-June 2003) during the occupation of Iraq.

Earlier State Department postings also centered on countries in conflict: Saigon at the time of the Tet Offensive; Cambodia for the 1975 Khmer Rouge takeover; Lesotho for the cancellation of elections and declaration of a State of Emergency in 1970; and South Africa for the 1986 crisis of apartheid. He served in Thailand in the late 70s and early 80s at a time of domestic political turmoil, and monitored the Thai-Cambodian border as the Vietnamese invaded, destroying the Khmer Rouge regime, and during the subsequent refugee emergency. He was in Indonesia in the late 80s.

Following his retirement, Ambassador Carney entered the private sector as a consultant in the areas of national security strategy, conflict resolution and crisis management. He has facilitated numerous seminars on National Security Planning in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and South Asia. He also served as Chairman of the board of the Haiti Democracy Project, a small think tank. Born in Missouri in 1944, Ambassador Carney graduated from MIT in 1966 and later did advanced study in Southeast Asian affairs at Cornell. He speaks fluent Cambodian, French and good Thai. His publications center on Sudan, Cambodia, and wildlife conservation/hunting. In November 2007 he produced a Special Report for the United States Institute of Peace on negotiating and implementing Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement. In late 2005, together with a British photographer and with his wife, he helped write and produce a 336-page photo book, Sudan: The Land and the People that covers the entirety of Africa's largest country. He is married to journalist/author Victoria Butler and has a daughter.

INTRODUCTION

Dave Davis asked me to join you several times in earlier years, and I am delighted to be with you today. I shall speak as a practitioner, or, as one of my Foreign Service colleagues described me, as a “field mouse.” My 41 years in foreign affairs have been spent mainly in areas of crisis and conflict. The U.S. government sent me to succession of weak, fragile, developing, or sometimes hopeless states: Vietnam, Cambodia, Lesotho, Sudan, Haiti, Kenya, Iraq and, of course South Africa. Over the last half century, some of those nations have moved through various stages towards becoming acceptable members of the international community, relatively stable and responsible to their people.

I have usually focused, in both my writing and speaking, on current history and emphatically not political science so you shall find the remarks today jargon and acronym free although, perhaps, with some pertinent content despite that.

Forty-one years ago the United States and its Allies were in the midst of prosecuting the defense of South Vietnam. Today’s realities in what was once French Indochina must complicate any assessment of the strategic objectives the U.S. voiced in those days: Remember the Domino Theory? What other analyses drove various U.S. policies until Lyndon Johnson decided to end the war, and Richard Nixon promised \$3.25 billion to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam for a peace that ended in the SRV’s military victory? The major regional states created the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 1967, just before the Tet Offensive. Is Southeast Asia today relatively prosperous and, with some exceptions, dynamic because the Vietnam effort bought time for the beginnings of slow regional economic and, now, glimmerings of political integration? As a footnote to this question, we see that Vietnam is a member of ASEAN today.

That effort in Vietnam included heavily resourced programs in the areas of governance, economic reform, and decentralization. In Vietnam, the U.S. supported governance initiatives that included parliamentary elections as well as expanding local authority and development through the Civil Office for Revolutionary Development Support, or CORDS. The U.S. also funded broad, national economic development projects as well as a huge Commodity Import Program to generate local currency. In some form or another we are doing all these things in Afghanistan and Iraq. For example, the Provincial Reconstruction Teams working in Afghanistan and Iraq have drawn on the CORDS experience in Vietnam.

Unfortunately, we have not adequately addressed the fundamental weaknesses of our approach to modern conflict and post conflict transformation that became evident in Vietnam. We continue, to our detriment, to make the same mistakes.

WEAKNESSES AND FAILINGS

When I left Vietnam in 1969 at the age of 24, I wondered whether we had the capability to “win,” that is to achieve the strategic goals we set for ourselves. The same question faces us today and the 16 March *Washington Post* has a review of Jonathan Steele’s book, *Defeat: Why America and Britain Lost Iraq*. Steele asks if we could ever have gotten it right in

Iraq. [“Could it ever have Gone Right,” Daniel Benjamin, *Washington Post*, March 16, 2008, Book World, p. 8] So, let this first part of our serious discussion focus on what we might call the cultural or, even, the structural elements in our society that limit our chances to achieve our stated objectives. I have experienced three.

The first is impatience. We are a very impatient lot and want instantaneous results. We repeatedly fail to grasp that our success will always depend on participation and support of the people of the country we are trying to help. They must have ownership of projects, plans, and programs. We are simply wasting our resources when we fail to include them in the planning process. This takes time and there are no easy short cuts in a truly consultative process. Has everyone heard of the Nine Woman problem? I raised this with the Commanding General of the Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I). It is that, even if you assemble nine women together, you cannot make a baby in one month. Our compulsion for quick results is a grievous cultural failing, especially prevalent in the U.S. military that rates its officers by their demonstrated capability to get things done. It leads us to build, often massively, where insufficient local “buy in” exists.

This failure is immediately recognized by the choices of metrics that measure “success” in terms of, say, numbers or pounds of leaflets dropped, amount of money spent, hours of radio/TV or other programming. Does anyone recall the Hamlet Evaluation Survey in South Vietnam? In other words, such metrics do not measure effects. They have little – sometimes nothing – to do with outcomes. You will recall that Mark Twain once decried the misuse of metrics as “lies, damned lies and statistics.” Were he alive today, he might rephrase that as “lies, damned lies and PowerPoint presentations.”

The second failing centers on our unwillingness to listen, part of an arrogance based in cultural and perhaps even racial pride. Our deafness has been especially costly in Iraq. Even when it became clear that the best case scenario under which the Coalition entered Iraq was false, that building Iraq was going to be a long-term effort; that the Coalition did not have enough forces to provide security in Iraq, the U.S. leadership failed to bring Iraqis fully into the governance of their country. Instead we opted to transform ourselves from perceived liberators into occupiers in fact, rather than just in law.

Vying for third place is a number of weaknesses from which I would choose ignorance as most important. Ignorance goes hand-in-glove with impatience and arrogance. We simply do not recognize that we must know an enormous amount about an adversary, a failing state or any arena in which we choose to enter with our lives and treasure to advance our interests. Examine, for example, the effort to understand Japan in all its complexity. Both our soldiers and our civilians took the time to learn about Japan, its history and its culture. This broader understanding led the Allies to accept the continuation of the Emperor despite his role in Japan’s WWII decisions, rather than force an unconditional surrender on the Japanese.

Contrast that with Iraq. We knew a few things thanks to the relatively small U. S. State Department Future of Iraq project. We had planned a few things. We had organized resources to ensure that the Iraqi oil sector continued to produce. We were also ready to deal with potential, refugee and food crises that never came to pass. We were not, however, prepared for almost anything else that happened.

On arriving in Kuwait to join Jay Garner’s Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, I had no data base on the Ministry I was to oversee, nor any information on the

Ba'ath Party beyond what was in Phebe Marr's history of Iraq. What I have subsequently learned is that there existed a recently-written 100-page U.S. Defense Department study, not highly classified, on the Ba'ath that could have answered most of our questions. With that study ORHA staff would at least have been placed to deal intelligently with the new Coalition Provisional Authority leader's de-Ba'athification decision.

STABILITY AND SOCIAL CONTRACT

Much of the argument today on the requirements for progress in nation-building, something that the Europeans more accurately calls "state building," centers on the areas of governance, rule of law, security, economics and social well-being. Rand adds "democratization."["The Beginner's Guide to Nation-Building," James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Keith Crane, Beth Cole DeGrasse, Rand Corporation, 2007] I would add "reconciliation" as a possible sixth area that is particularly important in Iraq and, to a degree, in Haiti and in Cambodia. At question, for us here at this conference, is how to determine where priorities must be placed and the proportions for each of the key areas.

What are the trade-offs if, for example we set security above governance? What is the sequencing? Do we know enough to determine what the mixture should be? Do we have the right resources at hand to address the areas in the likely changing proportions that need our attention? Do we actually have the expertise, even the technical capability, to realize our conclusions about the mix of these key areas? Finally, can we determine whether we are succeeding; assuming we have the wisdom to know what success actually looks like?

We might reduce some of this confusion, without diminishing the importance of the half dozen or so areas just listed, by moving up one level to be able to see more broadly and thereby help make decisions. I believe that our analyses need to center on two key elements, stability and the existence of a social contract. In examining these two concepts, the situation in Iraq will be an important illustration, but so is that in Haiti and that in Sudan or Zimbabwe. All these states feature a broad range of conditions that are pertinent in the description of ailing, fragile, failing or failed states.

STABILITY

The Bush Administration in the United States contended in 2003 that bringing democracy to Iraq was all important. A close and experienced friend argued to me before I went to Baghdad in 2003 that what was important was stability, not democracy. He was right and, indeed, stability in all of these situations is more important than "ologies" or "ocracies." That does not mean we can get to it. But, I argue to the analysts that the first question we must ask about any country that we identify as important to our national security interests is this: what are the prospects for stability and, especially, what will it take to achieve at least a basic level of stability.

What is interesting about Iraq in this respect is that the CPA in its early months did not focus on the larger issue of stability, but, rather embarked on reconstruction projects, throwing money out in large quantities in an effort to dodge the reality that growing

insecurity was destroying stability. The coalition failed to provide stability for a number of reasons. It had too few troops and what they did have was the wrong skill mix. We needed military police, for example, to provide basic security in the cities.

But, the Coalition also failed to provide another kind of stability...let us call it psychological stability. Too quickly Iraqis believed themselves to be occupied rather than liberated. The coalition's first orders – de-Ba'athification and disbanding the Army – exacerbated this perception. The Coalition's inability to deliver essential services further alienated many Iraqis. On this last point, note that one of the Coalition's most serious errors was on the communications front. It made no real effort to manage the Iraqi expectations. On the contrary it made too many promises – from electricity and clean water to law and order and democracy -- that it could not or would not satisfy. Jerry Bremer's assertions in late 2003 that power generation had equaled pre-war levels were simply not true, quite apart from the issue of distribution.

In examining the case of Haiti, you might argue that stability exists now, largely because of the security of an important United Nations Peacekeeping Mission, and as a result of credible, internationally-monitored elections that brought an authentic Haitian political figure back to power. At the same time, however, Haiti could suffer a serious reversal on its path to better governance as vital legislative elections risk to be delayed.

Sudan, about which we will hear much more during this Conference, continues to surprise some analysts who cannot understand how the Islamists are able to maintain hold on power in the North. Stability seems impossibly fragile throughout the country. Near anarchy reigns in Darfur where the insurgents are deeply divided. In the South the SPLM/A authority is beset with governance issues, including corruption. It lacks capacity – the trained personnel as well as the industrial and communications infrastructure – to effectively manage its economic resources

Zimbabwe maintains stability despite an economic catastrophe wonderfully illustrated by an exchange rate of \$Z25million to \$US1. I have not fully assessed electoral prospects, postponed as of mid-March, but submit that the likelihood is that the ruling party, ZANU-PF, is beginning to unravel. That has implications for stability as chickens come home to roost in the coops of those who have, to continue the barnyard metaphor, fed too richly at the dictator's trough.

SOCIAL CONTRACT

A look across the web at definitions for the social contract produced two that work. The Princeton web [<http://wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=social%20contract>] calls it, “an implicit agreement among people that results in the organization of society; individuals surrender liberty in return for protection. Elsewhere and more explicitly, it is “an actual or hypothetical agreement that provides for the legitimate basis of sovereignty and civil rights and of rights and duties of citizens.” [www.filosofia.net/materiales/rec/glosaen.htm]

Evaluating the social contract requires considerable political acumen and dexterity. All of the States cited have a degree of real social contract. But they are very different and it is enormously tempting for political observers, much less policy makers to let their hopes

outride their analyses in looking at situations where interests and treasure are engaged. For example, Iraq's Shi'a are in a fragile consensus around the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki who is from the relatively small Dawa party. The likely confrontation between the larger Shi'a movements of Al-Sadr and ISCI, however, has serious implications for stability. It has the potential to impact both security and governance.

The relationship between the social contract and stability should be reinforcing. We know, however, that stability can exist without a broad social contract as leaders base themselves on smaller groups of similar political or religious views, or on members of the same tribe/clan. I argue that such stability is fragile. Americans, as witnessed in the political primaries, are currently engaged in a domestic debate about whether we should continue to maintain a military presence in Iraq. The vital question for the U.S. is whether the Iraqi political scene, especially elements of reconciliation and legitimacy of the national authority, can jell fast enough to justify the continuing expenditure of our blood and treasure.

An example of a so-far unsuccessful effort to establish a social contract is Cambodia. There, Norodom Sihanouk established a long period of stability in the mid 20th Century, with a broad but incomplete social contract that supported him as national ruler. He gave cause for revolt among some of his closest advisors, and separate cause for insurgency on the left. After the 1970 coup, Cambodian internal politics became enmeshed with broader players in the Vietnam War leading to a catastrophic victory by the Khmer Rouge, remaining senior figures of which are on trial in Phnom Penh today. The current authority in Cambodia largely came from among Khmer Rouge dissidents, and has used a combination of oppression, political appeal and economic opportunity to create a degree of stability in the country.

Building a social contract is a complex challenge. Governance is a vital area for building the social contract. Succeeding at creating a social contract requires attention to reconciliation where everyone can believe they have a part in national decisions. Economic development benefits are often the metric by which populations judge intentions and seriousness of political leaders, putting their legitimacy to the test. Can we accurately assess this process of building a social contract?

TRADE-OFFS AND PRIORITIES

From what has gone before, you will not be surprised to hear me conclude that stability is the most important immediate concern. And security is its principle handmaiden. We are talking about the relatively early stages of an effort to realize policies in states under grievous stress from violence or from the imminent threat of violence.

Priority must be on doing the utmost to ensure security. At the same time, authorities must be willing to accept an important level of risk to answer economic expectations. As one researcher has put it, a dynamic relationship exists between providing security and delivering services/increasing capacity. Some services are critical as, indeed, ORHA and the CPA recognized in Iraq: hospitals, water, a degree of electric power, certain chemicals, and agriculture.

If outside forces do not provide security, resources that might otherwise be used for

economic development will have to be spent on building indigenous security forces. This will take time. Each situation requires a serious assessment of the trade-offs between security and economic development given the financial resources available. At issue is what level of insecurity is tolerable in exchange for gains in essential services and economic progress.

What you cannot do, in my view, is what the CPA tried to do with the Iraqi Relief and Reconstruction Fund (IRR2). Without anywhere near the forces needed to establish a sense of law and order for Iraqis, the CPA seems to have put together reconstruction projects in the belief that, say, providing more electricity would somehow result in improved security. In fact, the situation needed instead to bring criminal gangs under better control, and to address the Al Qaeda elements of a growing insurgency in a timelier manner. Part of the IRRF effort was properly aimed at building Iraqi security forces, but, as everyone in development knows, building capacity is a long-term job. You cannot train police forces or a regular army to become functional in just months. In the meantime, Coalition forces in Iraq traded aspects of Rule of Law for their own safety by giving force protection too much primacy. They began, as MNF-I Commanding General David Petraeus has sometimes put it, “commuting to war” from the relative safety their Forward Operating Bases.

In parallel with the effort to ensure security, the governance area must have serious attention. In Iraq it should have included an early decision-making role for Iraqis and one that all Iraqis could perceive, not just an anemic Governing Council. Such a focus could have been an early step towards a broad, national social contract.

All countries in conflict need a mechanism for achieving reconciliation. I don't just mean political reconciliation. You often need social, economic and cultural reconciliation in order to achieve any kind of political reconciliation. In Iraq, you have religious, ethnic and tribal divisions that must be taken into account. Under Saddam Hussein the Sunni, especially Sunni Ba'athists prospered while most Shi'a lived in relative poverty. The clumsy CPA decisions on de-Ba'athification and seeming inability to grasp the essence of Shi'a politics prepared the ground for Al Qaeda's successful inflammation of sectarian tensions.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

There is no substitute for thorough advance planning. We must know as much as we can about the “ground truth.” And, then we must a clear idea of what we want to do and what resources – human and financial – are needed to do it. Planners must ensure that decision makers grasp exactly what is possible with the resources on hand.

This brings me to an observation on what I see as an institutional weakness in the U.S. foreign affairs establishment: the military puts major emphasis on planning; the civilian agencies, including the Department of State, generally are operational, their days consumed with demarches, meetings, and reports. Where planning is done, as the annual embassy work plans, it tends to rest on the shelves. In Iraq, the planning was hostage to assumptions about the best case scenario and to ignorance. The only plan in the Ministerial Pillar of ORHA was to establish Ministerial Management Committees to replace the existing Ministry leadership structure, but, in my case fortunately, not the important leading personnel.

The exception in my years in the State Department was in the Secretary of State's Office

of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, a relatively new entity. It contained a Planning Unit when I assumed Interim charge of it in March 2006. It was also focused on the effects of programs to achieve ends in what the military calls “loos,” that has nothing to do with the celebrated British term borrowed from the French, but are the lines of operation of a nation-building effort.

Rand’s very interesting primer on nation-building of 2007 correctly recognizes two broad approaches. One seeks to evolve the existing local institutions to move from violent to peaceful settlement of issues. The other would have the international effort dismantle the apparatus of the target state and build new institutions. In other words, regime change. The choice is rarely so stark. Most interventions are some mixture of both, but Haiti is a good example of the first and Iraq of the second.

The problem is that we sometimes do not have a choice as to which approach to take. In Iraq, the initial U. S. Defense Department thinking was to decapitate the regime and turn matters over within three months or so to a grateful structure that would have remained more or less intact. In Cambodia, the UN effort based itself on a set of agreements the Khmer parties accepted and the international community endorsed. The UN mandate ended with the selection of a Constituent Assembly and adoption of a Constitution. A small UN human rights office stayed on. While the effort succeeded in ending large scale violence it has not eliminated use of violence as an important political tool, nor made for sufficiently representative government in Cambodia.

This is to say that an international intervention for nation-building may not fully succeed in the sense of achieving what is desirable, rather than what is merely possible given the combination of international will and resources available. We need to get better at the practical process of nation-building. We need to do so because the international community is clearly agreed that large-scale violence must be controlled not only to limit the costs of refugee flight and internal displacement, apart from the terrible loss of life.