HOT TOPICS

Post-9/11: What Should U.S. Strategy Be in the Muslim World?

The September 11th attacks and the subsequent war on terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq dramatically altered the political environment in the Muslim world. This report examines the consequences of these tectonic events, as well as the trends that have been at work for many decades—factors that must be taken into account in designing any U.S. strategy. In particular, the report develops an analytic framework to identify major ideological orientations in the various regions of the Muslim world—from Morocco to Mindanao—and in Muslim diasporas in the West. It examines critical cleavages between Muslim groups and traces the long-term and immediate causes of Islamic radicalism.

Based on some key markers, researchers developed a typology that shows that Muslim groups fall within a spectrum from those that uphold democratic values and reject violence to those that oppose democracy and embrace violence. This typology can help U.S. policymakers identify potential partners in the Muslim world. Researchers also examined cleavages within the Muslim world—between Sunnis and Shi’ites and Arab and non-Arab Muslims and among ethnic communities, tribes, and clans—that have implications for U.S. interests and strategy. Moreover, researchers identified some of the longer-term factors, such as the failure of political and economic models in many Arab countries that has fueled anger at the West.

Researchers suggest a “shaping” strategy for U.S. policymakers composed of social, political, and military options, including promoting the creation of moderate networks to counter radical messages, disrupting radical networks, supporting “civil” Islam, and rebuilding close military-to-military relations with key countries.

READ MORE: U.S. Strategy in the Muslim World After 9/11

Putting U.S. and UN Nation-Building Operations in Perspective

A decade ago, in the wake of UN and U.S setbacks in Somalia and Bosnia, nation-building became a term of opprobrium. Today, nation-building appears to be a responsibility that neither the UN nor the U.S. can escape, with such efforts now at near-historic highs.

This report puts nation-building experience into a longer perspective, looking at eight U.S. and eight UN operations over the past 60 years and comparing them qualitatively and quantitatively in terms of inputs (such as manpower, money, and time), outputs (such as peace and democratization), and progress measures (such as economic growth). The study finds that nation-building is a cost-effective option for reducing the incidence and duration of civil wars, which inflict extraordinary human and economic costs on societies. It also finds that, assuming adequate consensus among UN Security Council members about the purpose for any intervention, the UN provides the most suitable institutional framework for most nation-building missions, as it has a comparatively low-cost structure, a comparatively high success rate (seven of eight countries are at peace and six of eight are democratic), and the greatest degree of institutional legitimacy. U.S.-led missions are best suited to those that require forced entry or employ more than 20,000 troops, which so far has been the effective upper limit for UN operations.

READ MORE: The Lessons of Nation-Building

What Should the U.S. Military Relationship with China Concentrate On?

Failures in the U.S.–China military-to-military relationship and its perceived lack of ability to produce tangible benefits have caused many observers to doubt its value and even argue that the relationship has harmed U.S. national security.

This report examines the debate surrounding U.S. China security cooperation and concludes that despite its problems, security cooperation between the two countries has value. Because of the possibility of armed conflict over Taiwan, the United States needs to maintain a military-to-military relationship with China, even though the relationship is heavily constrained in the benefits it can provide the U.S. military. Consequently, conducting the type and degree of military-to-military activities that have been conducted in the 1980s and 1990s is no longer appropriate. More specifically, the relationship should focus not on security cooperation, but on security management in which dialogue, information gathering, and limited cooperation when U.S. interests are at stake (such as the war on terrorism) take place to minimize misperceptions and the chances of conflict.

READ MORE: Managing the U.S.–China Military-to-Military Relationship

FORTHCOMING REPORT

A forthcoming RAND report, Strategic Choices in Science and Technology: Korea in the Era of a Rising China, identifies Korea’s main economic concerns related to China, presents alternative science and technology strategies for Korea, and shows how these strategies could affect Korea’s economic prosperity.

READ MORE: Strategic Choices in Science and Technology: Korea in the Era of a Rising China

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