

Speaker Summary: Ilan Berman and *Winning The Long War*

By Eric S. Morse

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When every problem looks like a nail, hammer away, or so the maxim goes. The current U.S. counterinsurgency strategy views the issue primarily as a military problem, and therefore asserts predominantly military solutions. Accordingly, the military is the tip of the spear, and all other tools at America's disposal—civilian reconstruction units, public diplomacy, education, economic aid, etc.—are not given priority. Ilan Berman disagrees with this strategy, and argues that the U.S. military is overstretched and needs non-military reinforcements in battling a *global* insurgency.

On July 15, 2009, Ilan Berman discussed his new book, *Winning the Long War: Rethinking the Initiative Against Radical Islam*, at a luncheon cosponsored by the National Strategy Forum and the Authors Group of the Union League Club of Chicago. Mr. Berman outlined a new, multifaceted direction for U.S. counterinsurgency strategy to win the war against radical Islam. The U.S. military alone cannot win this war for four critical reasons. First, the U.S. military lacks the capacity to fight a global insurgency, and continued overstretch only weakens America's other strategic goals and operations around the globe. Second, the global insurgency challenge is broader in scope than the current American strategy suggests. Not all insurgencies are the same—some of these insurgencies have local consequences, some of them have global consequences. Different challenges require different approaches, not all of which are most suited to the military. Third, the insurgents that our soldiers are currently fighting in the Middle East do not yet realize that they cannot defeat the American military. On the one hand, this suggests that the U.S. military will not be defeated in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq; on the other hand, radical Islamists are beginning to use more sophisticated, non-military methods to achieve their goals. If the U.S. fails to emphasize non-military counterinsurgency, then the ultimate battle for the hearts and minds of Muslims around the world may be lost. Finally, Mr. Berman argued that the U.S. is fighting a derivative war, one that overemphasizes the defeat of Al Qaeda after the 9/11 attacks. There are, in fact, three major groups in the war on global insurgency: Al Qaeda and transnational terrorists; state-sponsors of terror (such as Iran); and the 1.2 billion moderate Muslim voters scattered around the world. The latter should not be considered adversaries, but care must be taken to gain their support.

To broaden our strategic approach in the long war, Ilan Berman suggests that America should engage on five new battle grounds: ideology, communication, economics, international law, and democratization.

The ideological battle centers on the future role of Islam in world politics and culture. The focus should be on developing a peaceful and moderate Islamic world view. For example, Mr. Berman suggested that Al Qaeda has no positive, sustaining vision for the world. If the U.S. could discredit this radical ideological point of view, recruitment and appeal for radical Islam would decrease and moderate Muslim voices would have less to fear.

The communications battle highlights the importance of effectively conveying America's intentions and values to the diverse Muslim diaspora. However, America's current

communication strategy is clearly represented by, for example, President Obama's recent speech in Cairo, Egypt, in which he failed to clearly distinguish the inherent differences among Muslims. In reality, the Muslim community spans the globe. America's communication strategy must recognize the need for targeted messages, tailored to different Muslim communities.

The economic battle focuses on the alternative means by which the U.S. can use its economic power to influence state sponsors of terrorism. For example, Iran's economy is highly dependent on its oil revenue. With a barrel of oil hovering around \$64, Iran's break-even production point of roughly \$90 is unmet, causing the government to run a budgetary deficit. If the U.S. chose to influence the market price of a barrel of oil by decreasing American demand (through alternative sources of energy and increased efficiency), the economic effects would be disastrous for the regime in Tehran.

The international legal battle focuses on the challenges of creating laws that apply to transnational, state-less terrorists as well as state-sponsors of terrorism. Currently, the U.S. is muddling through a plan to close Guantanamo Bay. In a separate example, international law must face the challenges of motivating states to comply with legal agreements. North Korea and Iran are currently flouting UN sanctions. These legal problems need practical and potent solutions, neither of which will be easy to come by. Overcoming these obstacles would help to solidify America's non-military tools to use against radical terrorist groups and state-sponsors of terrorism.

Finally, the democratization battle emphasizes the growth of the civic values, political and legal institutions, and the economic development needed to turn non-democratic governments into popular, secular democracies. A democratization strategy should aim for subtle, overt political and economic changes that, over time, strengthen the political capacity of a country to evolve into a functioning democracy.

For Ilan Berman, the challenge of global insurgency cannot be overcome by military methods alone. America needs a smarter, broader, and more diverse approach to the global insurgency in order to win the long war against radical Islam.