

Re-ordering the UK's Campaign Primacy

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Recent reports of Taliban fighters speaking in Yorkshire and Midland accents in Afghanistan emphasise the mistake of placing our expeditionary commitments over our domestic campaign.

Although doctrinally US and UK forces appear to have changed course, the core values of our security institutions remain the same, and at their most instinctive level they have not altered sufficiently to keep up with the changing world. In operational terms we are still facing backwards towards an era when counterinsurgency was a purely expeditionary activity, whereas in reality we need to be thinking more seriously about a 21st century adversary which does not require overseas territories, and which flourishes within our own population.

Representing an overwhelming US presence, US counterinsurgency doctrine¹ is likely to become the concept for every future coalition. So it is this doctrine, and not a yet to be written NATO or national version, which will influence our future *modus operandi*.

FM3-24 has the appearance of novelty, it mentions the 'global dimension' and the possibility of 'insurgent networks', but in practical terms its prescriptions are only relevant to an expeditionary, territorial intervention focused on a particular state, with a clearly recognisable centre of gravity. The US doctrine is saying in effect that although the adversary which we seek to address is established globally and exerts itself in the virtual dimension, the military response will be a traditional unilateral expedition, whose capabilities will be tangible, territorial and limited to a space that is physical.

The US National Strategy for Combating Terrorism speaks of a franchised, de-centralised al-Qaeda, but at the same time constantly returns to the idea of a vertically organised enemy. Despite acknowledging its virtual characteristics the US version of the adversary requires some distinctly old fashioned supporting facilities, in the form of sanctuaries in rogue states, state sponsorship and the shelter of strategic countries which offer a haven for terror. The logic of the US counter strategy is therefore to interdict these physical sources of support.

However, in Europe the strands of social tension, which increasingly underwrite the situation they face in 2008, were manifested before 9/11. In the hot summer of 2001, directly prior to the September attacks on the United States, serious rioting by young Muslims in urban areas across the British Midlands² already showed that European states, particularly the UK, faced a dire and completely different security problem to the one articulated in the US strategy. This development³ revealed that Muslim migrant communities in Europe were (and

¹ US Army and USMC. FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency HQ Department of the Army and HQ Marine Corps Combat Development Command. Washington. 15 December 2006.

² BBC News 28 May 2001. "In Pictures : Oldham Riots".

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1354441.stm>

BBC Radio 4 News, 27 May 2001, 1201 GMT. "Oldham Riots; Two Perspectives" BBC <http://news.bbc.co.uk>. as at 20 August 2007.

³ *Community Pride not Prejudice*, Bradford Race Review 2001. www.Bradford2020.Com/pride/

Anwar M. " Muslims In Britain: Issues , Policy and Practice"; in Ed Tahir Abbas. 2005. *Muslim Britain, Communities under Pressure* . Zed Books, UK

still are) socially, economically and culturally less well integrated than in the US.⁴ In 2008 it follows therefore that the European NATO states are less concerned by the adversary model advanced by the US in their national strategy, where the net flow of terrorists is said to be from the overseas sanctuary to the target state, than by terrorist attacks arising from within their own population. Even in the 1990s the security problem for Europe was already becoming the antithesis of the model presented by the Bush Administration. Europe's 'enemy foot soldiers' came from the second or third generation of migrant families living in their own countries, who were essentially Europeans. Nor it seemed were they being subverted from a distant overseas sanctuary, they were the product of a home-grown, organic process which was driven by the isolation, cultural exclusion and racial animosity experienced in the streets of their home towns. It was only after they reached a vulnerable state that the glittering prizes proffered by the jihadi had any relevance.

This reality meant that in stark contrast to the US, the Europeans were compelled to respond on two different fronts. Although they still shared an interest in the expeditionary campaign against the overseas sanctuary, they also had to reconcile that commitment with rising disaffection in their own migrant populations. Six years after the emotional responses to 9/11 the US view of the primacy of the expeditionary campaign encounters a very different European position.

In common with other European states the British government is engaged on two fronts, the overseas expeditions against the supposed sanctuaries in Afghanistan and Iraq, and a domestic campaign to stem disaffection and radicalisation in its own population. These campaigns are organisationally distinct. The overseas effort principally involves Defence, Foreign Affairs and Overseas Development, whereas the domestic plan of action principally involves the Home Affairs ministry. The problem is that in the UK the images and reverberations of the overseas campaign act against the domestic campaign. It is the continuous traffic of routine news and political debate concerning British troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, rather than old fashioned jihadi propaganda, which antagonises the vulnerable Muslim element of the British population, especially those who see their faith as the target of the war against terror.

Despite the obfuscations of its government, the British *de facto* give primacy to the expeditionary campaign. This prioritisation is not explicit, but by deed and declaration the government pursues its expeditionary campaigns in denial and disregard of mounting evidence that the UK's foreign policy and military profile in the war against terror contributes to the increasing radicalisation of its own Muslim population.

Argued in the strictest logic this tacit prioritisation of the expeditionary over the domestic acts against British security interests for five reasons:

1. In Britain the net flow of potential terrorist attackers is not from an overseas sanctuary into the UK; the threat arises in UK.
2. The threat that arises in UK is more immediate and dangerous than the possibility of attack by foreign or foreign domiciled terrorists and therefore must take priority.
3. The overseas sanctuaries, which are said to harbour training camps and have been regarded as an essential stage for an attack on the UK

See also Anwar M and Qadir B 2003. "British Muslims and State Policies , Warwick Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations in EU Commission.

⁴ PEW Research Center. Muslim Americans 22 May 2007

population have become less important; self evidently they are desirable but no longer critical to the terrorist attack procedure.

4. The present overseas campaigns are kinetic and attritional; the history of counterinsurgency does not favour the attritional approach. The opportunity for the British to be manoeuvrist lies at home and not in the expeditionary effort.
5. The al-Qaeda model used to justify the US expeditionary campaigns to the US voter cannot be applied with much conviction to a British or even a European situation.

The response to Brigadier Ed Butler's report in the Telegraph is not therefore to redouble our efforts in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The threat, and the net flow of terrorists, is not from FATA to UK – it starts in the UK and returns to the UK. It is not the locally recruited foot soldiers of the Taliban who are expected to come to Britain in order to detonate themselves in the rush hour traffic; it is the British jihadis. Set in these terms the campaign of attrition in Helmand is not a manoeuvrist or a logical response. What we need is a much more convincingly directed multi-sectoral campaign in the grim suburbs of the British midlands, which is led by a genuine political strategy and in which the domestic operation takes primacy.