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Lost in Translation: Grand Strategy on the Asymmetric Battlefield

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Introduction

Recent developments in both Iraq and Afghanistan serve to exemplify the extent to which Western recalcitrance in the area of grand strategy has robbed asymmetric warfare of its strategic salience in the current century¹. While a primary theoretical pillar of the War on Terror has been the institutional endeavour to introduce an unprecedented level of operational fluidity to warfighting through which national interest can be telegraphed to geographically distant battlefields with sociopolitical expediency, the tendency of Western security establishments to overburden narrative and informational frameworks in practice has only served to compound the incumbency advantage inherent to the lesser axes in terms of both material means and operational kineticism in asymmetric conflicts^{2,3}. This has thrust the grand strategic projects which have served to underpin the operational alignments of Western security establishments since the end of the Second World War into an era of intellectual flux. Namely, the extent to which hybridized tactics such as counterinsurgency and counterterrorism have been practically stunted by the strategic overburden of liberal hegemony is especially relevant as the West sets out to recalibrate its standards of success for warfighting in the 21st century.

Background

This paper will examine observable disparities in strategic rigidity between great and middle powers in their efforts to temper comprehensive counterinsurgent and counterterrorist programmes with the strategic calculus necessary to derive realistic win conditions from an extant lineage of interstate hostilities^{4,5}. Put simply, the following will establish both the essentiality of, and failure to, draft high level strategic frameworks within the confines of practical necessity as opposed to domestic political aspiration on the part of Western hegemonic interests. Strategic fluidity, where it exists in American led counterinsurgent efforts, has been confined in scope by failed efforts to export Western sociological features to distant battlefields under the auspices of nation building⁶. In contrast, middle/regional powers in heightened threat environments such as Israel have demonstrated the extent to which devolution from grand strategy in order to elevate practical military objectives to the leading boundary of operational planning has paid dividends against asymmetric enemies⁷. Thus, this paper advances a thesis of success in adaptability at the expense of traditionally overburdened grand strategic foundations in the context of modern Western strategic frameworks.

Conclusions

The relative inability of Western security and intelligence establishments to overcome the incumbency advantage inherent to the lesser axes of asymmetric conflicts has ushered in an era of opportunity in redefinition insofar as the tenability of purely aspirational currents in the field of grand strategy is eroding. Subsequently, this paper concludes the essentiality of crafting grand strategy in line with popular perceptions of threat environments and thus the strategic congruity inherent to devolution of grand strategy to the level of frontline necessity⁸. As relevant policymakers confront the task of reconfiguring the Western approach to asymmetric warfighting, so too do the corresponding security establishments face the opportunity of closing the conceptual distance between insurgent threat environments and their civilian constituencies and discerning emerging means of strategic agility in the process.

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