Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, Americans and their allies have slowly and painfully come to the conclusion that they are in a Long War to create a new political order in the Islamic world that we can better live with--that is, a region with greater inherent stability of the sort that comes from a legitimate government that is at peace with us, with its neighbors, and with its own people. We have found that we cannot comfortably accommodate, in an age of terrorism and the spread of nuclear weapons, what John Quincy Adams called "derelict" states.

And so our policy strongly suggests that our strategy imitate the "clear, hold, and build" tactics that underlie the success of the Iraq surge and the progress made in the U.S. sectors of Afghanistan. Strategically, we are attempting to clear, hold (preferably through allies, rather than ourselves directly), and build on a larger level, in an effort often described as a global counterinsurgency. The policy also suggests that it is the "building" that makes for a decisive victory. That is, victory on the battlefield is not the same as victory in the war; military success is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition. And a corollary is that the military's tasks--for the military's missions are rightly defined by the nation's needs and by political leaders, not by any internal structure of the armed forces--extend beyond the destruction of enemy forces.

Yet the need for "building"--which, at minimum, means state-building--means that there are missions that demand more than military power. And so there has been a lot of effort to mobilize other agencies and other elements of American power, even in cases where these other agencies are poorly suited or highly reluctant to be mobilized. Others with experience of modern counterinsurgencies, such as the Australians, often describe this as a "whole of government" approach. It is an approach that makes great common sense, but one that needs to be correctly translated into an American idiom without inverting the real meaning...

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