

János Kemény:

Measuring Success in Iraq and Afghanistan

The presentation's main focus will be to highlight what kind of problems today's war pose in terms of tracking actual progress. The topic is very important, because trend in today's conflicts is increasingly pointing towards the directions of more low intensity, intrastate conflicts, with which the international community will have to deal with. Despite this trend, there is actually very little understanding in the non-military sphere about how these conflicts work and what they mean. The education system usually only goes until the second world war, and doesn't cover those conflicts of the twentieth century, which would be much more useful for the understanding of today's conflicts, such as the Algerian uprising against France, British experiences in Malaya or the French and later American experiences in Indochina and Vietnam. That's why in my opinion many people try to comprehend the actual fighting happening, which is low intensity and low-tech, in the terms of interstate industrial war, which is not suitable for these conflicts.

I'd like to address the problems through a military and a non-military point of view. Both are important, because in our mediatized society, the public's perceptions about war also an important factor in the outcome, as far as the lack of public support can lead to the reduction or termination of unpopular military actions abroad. The military aspect is also important, because Western militaries were confronted with an old challenge in a new way: insurgencies aren't anything new, but thanks to the advance of technology they are much more visible to everyone and they've developed successful tactics and strategies to counter the Western military edge.

On the military side, I want to give an overview of the methods that have developed to track the progress of these counterinsurgency campaign, with a great emphasis on the US military's well known FM 3-24. An important part of this point will be to emphasize what differences there are between long duration low intensity conflicts and short duration high intensity conflicts and reflect on the political nature of these conflicts. I'll also try to highlight the classical works of counterinsurgency theory, and what they say on the question of metrics. The paradoxes of counterinsurgency are numerous and important and will get a central place in my presentation.

On the non-military side, I want to address the fundamental discord between the wars fought and the perception of war in the public. As some commentators say, counterinsurgency theory became a kind of religion in the public sphere, thanks to its moderately successful application in Iraq, which proved vital in lowering the brutal violence executed by insurgents groups. I want to highlight the pitfalls of this kind of thinking and the dangers hidden in it.

As a synthesis, I will present a set of methods and indicators, which can be used by an avid consumer of news to make some sense of the action taking place on today's battlefields.