

The purposes of war

Mary Ann McGivern | May. 30, 2012 NCR Today

[The New York Times reports](#) [1] a debate going on at West Point about whether counter-insurgency is an effective strategy.

General David Petraeus quite literally wrote the book on combating terror, *The US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. The idea is to hold your fire, build roads and schools, and identify community leaders and work with them. It's expensive and, for a lot of reasons, hasn't worked well in Iraq and Afghanistan.

So West Point is having an important conversation: When we go to war, does the United States aim to defeat a people or to build a nation by winning their hearts and minds?

Meanwhile, Petraeus is now directing clandestine killing of terrorists at the CIA. That, too, deserves consideration.

Then there's our 5,000-piece, deteriorating nuclear stockpile, the 17 or so nuclear subs roaming the oceans and the hardened silos where missiles are pointed at Russian cities. To what purpose?

Yes, it's a dangerous world out there. But a lot of that danger is of our own making. For example, we, the United States, have given far more aid to Pakistani military dictatorships than to civilian democracies. Petraeus is right that if the local community sees a path to a better future, they won't support a terrorist movement.

But is the army the best means of building that path? Maybe instead of comparing counterinsurgency with traditional war, it should be compared to the costs and outcomes of the Peace Corps.

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[1] http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/28/world/at-west-point-asking-if-a-war-doctrine-was-worth-it.html?_r=1&nl=todaysheadlines&adxnnl=1&emc=edit_th_20120528&adxnnlx=1338215351-McMKCZ/gp5EnprRW4r4sgQ&pagewanted=all