RESEARCH NOTE: CONCEPT TO DEVELOP A SOFTWARE-BASED COUNTER-TERRORISM CAMPAIGN DECISION SUPPORT TOOL

Dr. Joshua Sinai
Associate Professor/Research
Center for Technology, Security, and Policy
Virginia Tech (National Capital Region)
1101 King Street, Suite 610
Alexandria, VA 22314
jbsinai@vt.edu

ABSTRACT

In the public policy community, a need exists for a software program that applies leading concepts of counterterrorism (CT) analysis to systematically display, track, operationalize and update on one’s computer all the decisions and processes involved in addressing all the measures required to respond to, and, if possible, resolve on-going terrorist-type insurgencies. Such a toolkit would be employed for analytical and training purposes, not necessarily in a government’s CT campaign. Since no such customized software exists at present (based on the author's knowledge), analysts studying these issues end up relying on creating briefing books and powerpoint presentations on what they consider to be effective components of CT responses, without, however, using templates that can be updated and revised for new analyses. This research note, which is of a preliminary nature, is primarily descriptive and does not include a discussion of how the tool would be operationalized in a software program. Hopefully, this note will generate interest in a collaborative effort to create such a tool kit.

CONCEPT FOR A COUNTER-TERRORISM TOOL KIT

The objective of the envisioned counter-terrorism (CT) tool kit is to guide the users in understanding all the response strategies and operational and tactical measures required to resolve terrorist-type insurgencies, whether in the short, medium, or long terms. Of particular relevance to contemporary CT concerns, the software program would also have the capability to help users understand how to respond to the spectrum of potential threats, whether conventional low-impact, conventional high-impact, or chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and cyber (CBRN/Cyber) insurgent warfare.

Such a software program will assist the users through all phases and roles not only of a prototypical, generic CT campaign but an actual on-going campaign, from the initial response phase of the outbreak of hostilities to conflict termination and the post-conflict reconstruction phase.

Such a CT software program is required at this time because of the escalation in the threats by terrorist groups against states, in places such as Afghanistan, Egypt, India, Israel-Palestine, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Yemen, Chechnya, Russia, North Africa, Western Europe and the United States.

In some cases, terrorist insurgencies can be resolved peacefully. Peace accords have been reached with insurgents in Northern Ireland, for example.

In other cases, such as the insurgency by al Qaida and its affiliates against their adversaries, only a military or law enforcement solution is possible because these insurgents’ actions and demands are so politically extremist, undemocratic, or criminal, making conciliation with them impossible.

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The CT software program will be grounded in the leading concepts and approaches in the fields of counter-terrorism, counterinsurgency and conflict resolution, and illustrated by empirical cases of resolved and ongoing terrorist insurgencies, such as in Northern Ireland, the al Qaida-led Islamist resistance movement, Israel vis-à-vis the Palestinians, the LTTE insurgency in Sri Lanka, the ETA insurgency in the Basque Province in Spain, Kashmir, and Algeria. Examples of successful peace treaties or accords that have resolved or attempted to resolve terrorist insurgencies will be included. These accords could be used as models by the user to formulate a peace accord to resolve an actual terrorist insurgency.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The software program will consist of two parts: first, an overview of generic CT campaigns, including the strategic, operational, and tactical components of the campaign, and second, a series of templates for the user to input data, ordered around the CT plan's components and segments that can be quantitatively evaluated. These templates are intended to serve both as a decision making roadmap and a forecasting tool to provide the necessary criteria to plan, manage, measure and evaluate the results of the CT campaign, including planning for the post-conflict, reconstruction nation building phase.

Two possible applications are envisioned for the CT software program. The first application is a templated tracking and reporting interface to provide the users with situational awareness, including status summaries, of effective counter-terrorism measures in order to assess a previous or plan or evaluate an ongoing CT campaign. Following the development of this prototype, a second software application might be developed that would provide real time or near real time, operational “situational management” of an ongoing counterterrorism campaign to serve as a decision supporting and decision making tool, encompassing data input and analysis from overseas diplomatic, military, and intelligence reporting posts to national level CT planners.

The CT software program is envisioned as an automated, easy-to-use planning, managing, and evaluating application that will walk the users through the counter-terrorism planning process, such as thinking strategically about the government's position vis-à-vis the terrorist insurgent compared to other, non-combatant parties to the conflict, building forecasts with any level of detail, and creating and managing CT action plans.

The program's user interface will draw on Windows 2007/Vista functionality.

The CT software program will be accompanied by an explanatory booklet.

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION

The CT software is intended to guide the user through the entire process— from the initial steps of responding to the outbreak of a terrorist insurgency to the end-point of conflict resolution, with each step involving the full spectrum of options, situation reports, and ideal- and worst-case scenarios; strategic, operational, and tactical planning and execution, including coercive (military) and conciliatory (peaceful) responses; the interaction between governmental, insurgent, and third party actors in a typical conflict, culminating in either military victory, defeat, or stalemate, or negotiated settlement, including the post-conflict reconstruction of society.

The tool is intended to highlight the strategic, operational, and tactical components of the CT plan, with sub-menus, tracking lists, and to do tasks. A series of adjustable screens will sequence the CT campaign's components.

The tool will also include a diagram as well as templates to guide the user to effectively respond to terrorist insurgent grievances that would differentiate actionable grievances versus irresolvable demands by insurgents. New criteria will be defined to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate grievances (e.g., whether they are anchored in international law), as well as the differing perspectives of governments and insurgents towards grievances. The diagram would provide an ordered range of intervention points for governments. The goal is to enable decision-makers to make plausible responses at appropriate points to plausible grievances.

The model will include a series of templates to plan, manage, forecast, and evaluate an actual CT campaign's attempt to resolve an ongoing conflict, with all its components and sequences (which could be adjusted), and assess the results.

The templates will also include a representative sample of peace plans and treaties agreed to by governments and terrorist insurgents, whose features could be integrated by the users in planning or evaluating ways to resolve their own campaigns. These representative samples will be drawn from the resolution or attempted resolution of the insurgencies in El Salvador, Cambodia, Israel vis-à-vis the Palestinians, Northern Ireland, Mozambique, etc.
The templates used in the program would specify as much or as little detail as required, and could be accompanied with comments by the participants and evaluators, with one sentence or more of elaboration.

Every screen will include a definition of terminology. A tutorial will help to explain what is on the screen.

After completing the plan setup, which will provide an overview of generic CT campaigns, ranging in type and success/failure, the program will move to the strategic, operational, and tactical components of the campaign. The strategic portion of the CT plan consists of the plan description, a mission statement, and the plan's objectives. The operational execution of the plan is the primary focus of the tool because it links strategic objectives and tactical actions. Thus, at the operational level political, diplomatic, military, judicial and law enforcement agencies are employed to achieve strategic goals through the execution of a CT campaign. The tactical portion consists of the plan's programs, activities, and operations, including promotional actions (a variety of programs to win the targeted population's "hearts and minds," such as "war of ideas," psychological operations and various conciliatory programs, such as civic action and nation building). The estimated cost and its potential return on investment of each of the tactical programs will be shown on a cost-benefit screen.

The system will automatically generate segment wrap ups that will summarize in one screen the strategic, operational, and tactical components, to make it convenient for reference later on when writing action and after action programs and lessons learned reports.

The system will create action to do lists and task assignments (start and end dates for assignment, persons responsible, and the base cost of action). The to-do lists will help track actions that need to be done on a weekly, monthly, or quarterly basis and the status of actions. For each portion of the plan, a summary will be generated to show the overall resource allocation by the plan's strategic, operational and tactical components. The summary will sort all actions according to criteria listed at the top of the chart by segment, program, CT components, staff responsible, or specific dates to accomplish tasks.

The system will create a planning calendar that would serve as a mini forecasting system. Target dates will enable forecasting. Critical target dates will become opportunity dates in order to identify need periods. These will be shown as color coded dates on the calendar. The calendar will appear simultaneously as a small box on the screen.

In the tool’s concluding section, the actual results of the CT campaign will be filled in, ranging from a military to a peaceful resolution of the terrorism conflict, or a political or military stalemate. The input of data into the templates will generate information to assess the strengths and weaknesses in the overall CT plan, as well as its segments, which will be scored in terms of their effectiveness. The system will generate a total score for each segment. The system will then generate effectiveness graphs in black and white or color. Graphs will automatically be created on display or be manually generated.

The concluding section will include a provision for outside comments to help in evaluating the CT campaign as well as in planning future CT campaigns, such as what is likely to go right or wrong in implementing and executing the plan. A program summary will also be created to summarize all key components and segments of the plan for future reference.

The concluding portion will also include a section on implementation requirements for negotiated peace settlements that would assess the factors that are likely to make peace accords effective or ineffective in resolving terrorist conflicts in the long-term. Among the factors to be assessed in peace accord effectiveness are whether they are based on all-inclusive or partial societal consensus; the extensiveness of the treaty's details; the nature of the agreement's implementation phase, including the demobilization, disarmament, and restructuring of the armed forces (including the terrorist insurgents), police, and any paramilitary forces; the capacity of the state to perform basic administrative functions; the willingness of the state to establish the rule of law, including holding free and fair elections, promoting human rights, and creating an impartial and independent judiciary; and, if applicable, reforming socioeconomic institutions. The model would apply these effectiveness factors to assess what other factors are necessary to resolve cases where peace accords have been reached but remain far from being fully implemented.

The grouping of segment and component screens could be arranged in different orders, and could be printed or saved in a file or could be e-mailed within a property or outside it. Import and export buttons would allow files to be sent. The comments about particular aspects of the CT campaign could be sent on disk or e-mailed to the appropriate official responsible for planning. Anyone needing to review these screens or the whole plan will be able to write a comment on every screen individually without altering the original plan. Multiple comments would be able to be stored for each screen, and a combination of screens could be generated for appropriate officials.

This will help to create a CT plan that could be managed, forecast, and evaluated, with all elements of the CT plan contained in the software program.

All information would be stored in the software for immediate and future reference.
CT PROGRAM’S CONTENTS

Introduction

Part I: The CT Generic Model

Counter-Terrorism Strategies
Ideal- and Worst-Case Scenarios
Political-Military CT Plan
Strategic, Operational, and Tactical Planning
Responding to Terrorist Insurgent Grievances
Legitimate Vs. Illegitimate Grievances
Responding to Terrorists’ Conventional Warfare
Responding to Terrorists’ CBRN/Cyber Warfare
Operational and Tactical Execution of the CT Campaign
Coercive Measures
Military, Police and Intelligence Operations
Political
Judicial
Diplomatic
Conciliatory Measures
Military, Political, Judicial, Socio-Economic Reforms
Threshold Level for Conciliation
Interaction Between Governmental, Terrorist Insurgent, and Third Party Actors
Spectrum of CT Campaign Outcomes
Representative Samples of Peace Accords
Post-Conflict Phase: Implementation Requirements for Peace Accords

Part II: Templates for Planning, Managing, and Evaluating the CT Campaign

The Nature of the Terrorist Insurgent Threat
Strategic Planning
CT Campaign Plan
Mission Statement
Operational and Tactical Planning
Implementing the CT Campaign
Operational Execution
Programs and Operations
Tactical Execution
Programs and Operations
Planning Calendar
Program Summary
CT Campaign Outcome
Military Victory, Stalemate, or Defeat
Peaceful Resolution of Terrorist Insurgency
Preparing for a Negotiated Settlement
Formulating the Peace Accord
Program Summary
Planning for the Post-Conflict Reconstruction of Society
Evaluating the CT Campaign
Effectiveness Graphs
Cost/Benefit Analysis
Lessons Learned