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In My View

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IN MY VIEW

IRREGULAR MARITIME STRATEGY

Sir:

It was both informative and a pleasure to read Martin Murphy's "Suppression of Piracy and Maritime Terrorism" in the Summer 2007 issue of the *Naval War College Review*. I do want to comment on his use of the mining of Nicaraguan harbors in the mid-1980s to illustrate a successful strategy of economic dislocation focusing on maritime targets. In addition to being a former Foreign Service Officer who served in Central America during the period, I have recently had the opportunity to revisit the harbor mining while writing *Crossroads of Intervention*, my just-completed book about U.S. involvement in the wars there as a bridge between Vietnam and Iraq.

There is an important twist to the harbor mining that bears directly on his assessment of irregular maritime strategy. Not only did the Nicaraguan mining, as he states, "depend on covert American assistance for its success," but a clandestine team of CIA sea raiders that included U.S. Navy SEALs operating from go-fast boats and a converted oil rig tender conducted the entire campaign. The Contras themselves knew nothing about it until their CIA handlers gave them a statement to read in which they claimed credit. In addition to causing direct damage, the intent of mining Corinto Harbor, along with sea-borne attacks on tankers and shore-based oil facilities at Puerto Sandino, was to raise the risks to international shipping, thereby increasing insurance rates and provoking hesitation in Nicaragua's suppliers. In this the campaign was a partial success. However, by far the greater impact of the mining was the blowback that erupted in Congress when the CIA role became public and the Nicaraguan government won a judgment in the International Court of Justice that the United States had engaged in unlawful use of force (although the U.S. refused ICJ jurisdiction).

There is another naval-operations angle. At the same time Washington was supporting the Nicaraguan insurgency against the Sandinista government, it was providing counterinsurgency support to the Salvadoran government next

door. Maritime assistance to El Salvador was aimed at interdicting clandestine arms trafficking by sea from Nicaragua to the Salvadoran FMLN guerrillas, under circumstances similar to those Murphy cites of the Israelis and Palestinians. U.S. measures included the nearly full-time stationing of a Navy frigate offshore, along with operating an intelligence facility on Isla de los Tigres in the Gulf of Fonseca and providing security assistance to develop the brown-water capability of the Salvadoran navy. What is most notable is that this effort had had almost no impact on the flow of arms, which became apparent after the war ended in 1992.

Because they took place in America's backyard, there was also a regional maritime dimension to the wars in Central America. One underlying justification for U.S. determination to halt the spread of Soviet- and Cuban-backed revolution in Central America was the extrinsic national security interest in guarding Caribbean Basin sea lines of communications. Although, as Colin Gray has pointed out, at the end of the day Cuba was a "strategic hostage to U.S. sea power," among the principal consequences of the Bay of Pigs debacle and the Cuban missile crisis was the effective shielding of the Castro regime from any further direct U.S. military action. Moscow avoided provoking the United States directly in the Caribbean again, and the way remained open for Cuba to continue serving as the regional sponsor of revolution in Central America, providing an uninterrupted platform for transshipping Eastern Bloc arms, primarily in Soviet vessels. These aspects of this already nearly forgotten conflict are a matter of public record, which I would be happy to amplify with details and additional sources.

TODD GREENTREE

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TARGETED KILLING

Sir:

Professor Gary Solis's article "Targeted Killing and the Law of Armed Conflict" (Spring 2007) is a well written opinion that the law of war does not render illegal

the killing at the direction of a state of a specific individual taking part in hostilities. An important element of the definition of “targeted killing” is that the individual cannot be reasonably apprehended.

I do not propose that any change or addition should be made to the article. Rather, I would like to emphasize the importance of the apprehension element from a practical as well as legal aspect. In the heat of battle between two military forces, it is difficult for troops not to desire to kill every enemy soldier, even after he has surrendered. However, commanders are well advised to make their forces aware not only of the illegality of such action but also of the advantages of capturing an enemy soldier. One of the more important reasons is the possibility of garnering valuable information and intelligence from him.

For this reason, any commander or official who is contemplating a targeted killing should consider whether or not apprehension of the individual is possible. This, of course, may raise other issues the person making the decision would rather avoid, such as how the individual is going to be incarcerated and what rights, if any, must be afforded him. If these matters can be satisfactorily addressed, the value of information that might be obtained about the enemy from the individual may be far greater than that of his demise.

I commend the *Naval War College Review* for sharing this thought-provoking article with us.

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