

# The art of asymmetric relations

*Former CIA agent says security in a global economy will be more about behind-the-scenes relationship building than armies*

**A**s the modern economy becomes increasingly global, developed countries should learn how to approach the vast masses of people living in impoverished and often war-stricken areas with a business proposition so the economically disadvantaged can refocus their lives from day-to-day survival strategies to long-term planning of wealth accumulation.

That's the view of former CIA officer

Henry A. Crumpton, who met with AmCham members to share his views on conflict-solving strategies that he believes are beginning to prevail in the increasingly globalized world economic scene. Crumpton, now head of The Crumpton Group consultancy, was hosted by AmCham's Political Discussion Forum committee.

Because of the anti-West sentiments of their governments, many areas are not risk free for Westerners. Once discovered who he or she is, a Western sales representative would have small chances of survival there,

according to Crumpton.

Thus, developed countries should proceed with caution. As we have learned from

**"For two years prior to the Sept. 11 attacks, we had cooperation with Afghan allies and we understood the strengths and weaknesses of our friends."**

**Henry Crumpton**, The Crumpton Group

Iraq and Afghanistan, sending there tens of thousands of military troops with a mission to defeat local regimes, topple local rulers and install a new order may cost a lot of money and lives – but still have rather limited chances of success in a short-term case scenario.

What is more cost efficient and immediately success oriented is to resort to what strategist Crumpton calls an asymmetric approach to conflict solving.

Instead of an army, Crumpton would send in groups of specially trained people


## Man with vision



Henry A. Crumpton

PHOTO: TOM CWORK

For his achievement in Afghanistan Henry A. Crumpton served as the Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the U.S. Department of State from August 2005 until February 2007 with the rank of Ambassador-at-Large. Working directly for the Secretary of State, he developed, coordinated, and implemented US counter-terrorism policy.

Crumpton is the President of the Crumpton Group (CG), which provides advisory services for companies investing in emerging markets. Allied with the law firm Akin Gump and the communications company Public Strategies, CG brings a holistic approach to managing global risk and opportunity. Ambassador Crumpton speaks publicly about international security, political issues, and leadership. He is on the Advisory Board of DC Capital Partners, a private equity fund. He is also a Distinguished Fellow at the EastWest Institute. 

in a task force. Once on the ground they would identify local community leaders – non-state actors – who are not necessarily friends of their governments. By interfacing with them, and sharing risks of everyday life, the task force officers would eventually help them boost their status and recognition among their constituencies by rendering specific humanitarian aid their communities are in desperate need of.

### The ultimate step

The ultimate step, Crumpton says, is to persuade local leaders to turn against their governments, abolish them and establish the foundations for a democratic system based on the principles of personal and economic freedoms. Too rosy, some may say. But such a strategy was proven right by through an effort headed by Crumpton in Afghanistan only a few years ago.

### Lessons from Afghanistan

It is a fact hardly remembered today that the second largest Afghan city, Kandahar, which was the last urban stronghold of the Taliban regime, fell within less than 90 days from the Sept. 11 attacks, on Dec 7, 2001. It was one of the most significant victories over the al-Qaeda forces that had been fueling the Taliban regime.

Almost equally ignored today is the fact that the victory was achieved with only 110 CIA officers on the ground in Afghanistan and about 300 special forces.

The victory was possible thanks to partnerships that the U.S. had with its allies in Afghanistan. Those were individuals held in esteem by the local communities but who were not parts of the official state apparatus. Crumpton refers to them as non-state actors.

“Starting September 1999, the . . . CIA with my encouragement and under my direction, sent troops to Afghanistan behind enemy lines to collect intelligence and engage in a very modest covert action with our Afghan allies,” Crumpton said. “So for two years prior to the Sept. 11 attacks, we had cooperation with Afghan allies and we understood the strengths and weaknesses of our friends and potential friends (among) regional leaders.”

### More than weapons

The aid rendered by the CIA to those of the regional leaders who wanted to fight the Taliban regime went beyond supplying weapons. CIA officers talked to tribal leaders to find out what were the needs of the tribes they led. Having collected wish lists, the CIA worked with the U.S. Air Force to drop the supplies in 100 separate locations. Each drop was tailor-made to what the Afghans on the ground wanted. Between October and December, 2001, the U.S. Air Force dropped 1.69 million pounds of goods, mostly humanitarian aid and some weapons.

“It was a great demonstration of re-

**“It was a great demonstration of responding to their specific needs and building trust.”**

Henry Crumpton, The Crumpton Group

sponding to their specific need and building trust,” Crumpton said.

Then they were set for fighting the regime they had never been in love with.

What made the CIA win was that apart from linking its strategic efforts with non-state actors in Afghanistan, the U.S. developed yet another advantage over the Taliban regime: an asymmetric capability.

Crumpton explains: “The Taliban regime had expected the U.S. would send heavy armed troops to Afghanistan following Sept. 11. They knew that a build-up of the Northern Alliance military presence would last for months, which in their view, offered enough time to wage a successful partisan war.”

Instead, the U.S. deployed a tiny little group of experts who did work behind enemy lines. Eventually, facing an insurgency instead of a mass-scale U.S. troop deployment, the Taliban regime was uprooted and crumbled in dismay.

### New relations

For Crumpton, the matrix of interests and influences in the world today goes way beyond the domains of officially recognized states, state leaders, and state institutions.

“The Western world is trying to de-

velop an asymmetric capability. Non-state actors acting as world of commerce proxies – this is growing: Hezbollah and Hamas are the obvious examples. That’s how the Western system is trying to take advantage of that. But there is a complete lack of integration in the world of commerce,” Crumpton notes.

But he is hopeful. Crumpton notes that a framework of how to work on the ground to offer local populations the chance to advance economically has been laid by the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) a U.S. agency that has been supporting economic development in 150 poor countries the world over since 1971. OPIC

fosters economic development in new and emerging markets, complements the private sector in managing risks associated with foreign direct investment and supports U.S. foreign policy—all without deploying military troops.

Crumpton derives a lot of satisfaction from the fact that his concept of networking with the local population has gained a fresh momentum after Muhammad Yunus the founder of Grameen Bank, won the Nobel Prize for pioneering the concept of micro-loans. Granted to people in impoverished areas who have no collateral and who do not qualify for conventional bank loans, micro loans enabled millions of Bangladeshis to buy all they needed to establish their own

businesses – from cows to cell phones – to take control of their lives themselves.

Along with non-stake actors and the asymmetric approach to conflict-solving, there is yet another factor – that the global marketplace is a battle field not just in a strategic sense but operationally and tactically. “And these three variables are emerging, converging and accelerating, which will be a challenge for a lot of us,” Crumpton says.

“But if we think about these variables, we understand them and we fold them into our strategic thinking of how we build our trusted networks, both public and private, all these variables pose enormous opportunities for us as well.”

Tom Ćwiok