

NC State study shows limits of using 'war on terror' to promote government policies

October 22 2008

A new study from North Carolina State University shows that there are definite limits on the government's use of the "war on terror" as a rhetorical tool for advancing federal land-use projects and other policy objectives. "The government can no longer rely solely on the 'war on terrorism' and 'national security' as arguments to maintain a crisis situation where local people willingly sacrifice protection of their 'homeland'," study author Dr. Kenneth S. Zagacki says.

The new study by Zagacki, professor and chair of NC State's Department of Communication, examines how citizens of rural Washington and Beaufort counties in North Carolina were able to compel the U.S. Navy not to build an outlying landing field (OLF) near the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. Zagacki explains that opponents of the OLF "defined themselves as patriotic, common-sense citizens trying to preserve their way of life, their farms and the nature reserve – and appeared more credible than the Navy representatives who tried to define the OLF debate largely as part of the war on terror."

The strategy of the OLF opponents, which included stakeholders ranging from conservative rural farmers to environmentalists, "provides an effective blueprint for how to build an effective alliance out of disparate bedfellows," Zagacki says. The approach could be applied in other areas faced with similar land-use issues, Zagacki adds. For example, Zagacki says, "evidence suggests that the Navy may face similar problems at other sites it is considering for OLFs in eastern North Carolina."

Instead, the study states that ordinary people – including housewives, politicians, farmers and mechanics – can work together to oppose the government's definition of a particular "crisis" and "show how the government's actions undermine their American way of life." The study, "Preserving Heritage and Nature During the 'War on Terrorism': The North Carolina Outlying Landing Field ('OLF') Controversy," will be published online by Southern Communication Journal Oct. 21.

Source: North Carolina State University

Citation: NC State study shows limits of using 'war on terror' to promote government policies (2008, October 22) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2008-10-nc-state-limits-war-terror.html>

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