

# PRISM

VOL. 3, NO. 3 ♦ 06/2012

CCO  
CENTER FOR  
COMPLEX OPERATIONS  
DIPLOMACY • DEFENSE • DEVELOPMENT

A JOURNAL OF THE CENTER FOR COMPLEX OPERATIONS

## FEATURES

- 3** Military Support for Democracy  
*by Dennis C. Blair*
- 17** Concept Failure? COIN, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Theory  
*by Colin S. Gray*
- 33** Silver Bullet or Time Suck? Revisiting the Role of Interagency Coordination in Complex Operations  
*by Andrea Barbara Baumann*
- 47** Finding Innovation in State-building: Moving Beyond the Orthodox Liberal Model  
*by Mark Sedra*
- 63** Capability Traps in Development: How Initiatives to Improve Administrative Systems Succeed at Failing  
*by Lant Pritchett, Michael Woolcock, and Matt Andrews*
- 75** Lessons from MoDA: Continuing the Conversation on How to Advise Institution-building  
*by Nadia Gerspacher and Adrian Shtuni*
- 87** Recognizing Systems in Afghanistan: Lessons Learned and New Approaches to Operational Assessments  
*by William P. Upshur, Jonathan W. Roginski, and David J. Kilcullen*
- 105** In Somalia, Kenya Risks Death by a Thousand Cuts  
*by Lesley Anne Warner*
- 119** The Opportunity Cost of Security  
*by Dov S. Zakheim*

## FROM THE FIELD

- 125** Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police  
*by Robert Hulslander and Jake Spivey*

## INTERVIEW

- 139** An Interview with Álvaro Uribe Vélez

## BOOK REVIEWS

**145** Hybrid Warfare and Transnational Threats: Perspectives for an Era of Persistent Conflict

*Reviewed by John Arquilla*

**147** Victory for Hire: Private Security Companies' Impact on Military Effectiveness

*Reviewed by T.X. Hammes*

# Military Support for Democracy

BY DENNIS C. BLAIR

In the past year three dictatorships with strong military support ended peacefully—in Tunisia, Egypt, and Burma. The armed forces of all three countries played a decisive role. Having for years supported autocratic regimes in which they enjoyed privileged positions, the army leaders in Tunisia and Egypt turned away from the very dictators who made them generals years before. In Burma a younger generation of officers took off their uniforms and set up the rudiments of a more democratic form of government. The outcome of the events in all three countries is not yet clear; what is clear is that military leaders in autocratic countries are not blind followers of the dictators who appointed them. They can turn against the regime or reform themselves in surprising ways.

Why do some military leaders step down as dictators, and why do others withdraw support from civilian autocrats who are often ex-military officers themselves, in favor of democratic elections? It has happened often. The Argentine junta handed over power in disgrace in 1983; the Turkish army has taken power several times but has then relinquished it; Thai General and then President Prem Tinnasulanond scheduled an election in 1989 and did not run in it; at about the same time in the Philippines, General and then President Fidel Ramos declined to change the constitutional term limit and retired; in Nigeria in 1999, a series of military coups ended in flawed but adequate elections that were followed by a decade of relative stability. This article examines the dynamics and causes of transitions from military-supported dictatorships to more democratic governments.

If military-supported dictatorships are susceptible to change, what can the developed democracies—the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, France, Germany, India, and the many smaller mature and established democracies—do to encourage the armed forces of autocratic countries to support these transitions? This article proposes ways in which the developed democracies

Admiral Dennis C. Blair, USN (Ret.), is the former United States Director of National Intelligence and was Commander of U.S. Pacific Command.

U.S. Marines demonstrate amphibious maneuver during multinational exercise Cobra Gold 2011 in Thailand





can use their military-military relations to encourage and assist democratic development around the world.

### The Worldwide Democratic Trend

Democracy has been on the move for years. It has taken different shapes in different parts of the world and in different countries. However, John Locke and James Madison would recognize it in many locations. The fundamental components are accountability

even the world's two largest dictatorships find they must use the language of democracy and pretend they embrace it

of the government to an electorate; an electorate that can give a government another term or vote it out of office; freedom of that electorate to organize itself for political activity; protection of the rights of all citizens, including minorities, by a system of laws that are fairly enforced by competent police and an independent judiciary; a low level of corruption with laws and institutions to contain it both in government and in business; and a free press. With the defeat of the two major antidemocratic ideologies of the last century—fascism and communism—and with the spread of information around the world, the universal appeal of democratic principles is having an ever stronger influence. Even the world's two largest dictatorships in China and Russia find they must use the language of democracy and pretend they embrace it. Strong governments that are not fully democratic nonetheless adopt some democratic practices to satisfy their people's aspirations, providing a basis from which further gains can be made.

There are also defining characteristics of the armed forces in a democracy. Their allegiance is to the people of their country, not to an individual, party, tribe, or ethnic or religious faction; they follow the orders of a freely and fairly elected government that represents the people; they do not support political parties or factions; and their primary mission is the defense of their country against external threats. When they are used within the country, whether it is to suppress an armed revolt, enforce a border, or provide relief following a natural disaster, it is for a limited time in support of domestic government organizations under special authorities and strict controls. They are established under provisions of a constitution or set of laws approved by a legislature, there is a means to determine the legality of orders they are given and actions they carry out, their budgets are provided by the legislature, and there is an established and fair system for promotion of officers and in the ranks based on performance.

Presidents Hosni Mubarak and Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali were unpleasantly surprised when the generals they had moved into leadership positions and cultivated for many years turned on them. They should not have been surprised. Generals around the world learned long ago that military dictatorships were losing propositions. Even when there was significant popular support for coups, as there was in Argentina in 1976 and in Turkey in 1971, generals and admirals found that they did not have the mandate or the skills to govern successfully for extended periods. In 2006, the Thai army found it difficult to solve the problems that motivated it to take power, and it quickly set up elections to return the country to a representative government. Burma was in fact the only purely



military dictatorship on the planet until last year. However, although military leaders are loath to govern through martial law themselves, in many countries they support authoritarian leaders. In these countries the generals seek to maintain a privileged position for themselves and their services while avoiding the risks of actually governing. They have learned that they know little about the economic management of their countries and that the top-down approach they have used in running military services is often ineffective and can excite widespread resentment when applied to national problems. They therefore stay out of direct involvement in internal governance and maintain a separate identity from the police, who handle internal security. However, they make it clear that they support the regime, and if necessary they will bring armed force to bear against those who oppose the regime and seek to change it. On a day-to-day basis, they often protect the regime through military intelligence services that operate domestically with the full range of military technical intelligence systems, and with unchecked arrest, intimidation, and incarceration capabilities. In the case of large-scale protests such as those in Iran in 2009 and in Syria at present, they use military units directly against regime opponents.

Nevertheless, military leaders around the world are increasingly realizing that working for a dictator is a bad bargain over the long term both for their services and for themselves. Their services will often receive institutional benefits such as autonomy, permission to run profitable businesses, virtual licenses for corrupt enrichment, and parades. They themselves will often receive personal rewards for a time—kickbacks, mansions, airplanes, and drivers—but those rewards

can be withdrawn as well as bestowed. More importantly, the longer a military-supported regime lasts, the more popular resentment builds up against both the dictator and his army. Military leaders realize that at some point a dictator will order them to turn their soldiers' guns against their people. When they do, the leaders become one with the regime, and from that time on popular opposition to the regime becomes hostility to the armed forces that support it. At that point, when the army becomes not the defender of the people but their oppressor, an important ethical and psychological threshold is crossed. To turn their guns on their people violates the core of their ethos as military officers. No matter how corrupt and cynical they may have become, the great majority of officers first put on the uniform to protect their country and its citizens, not to fight them. They are proud to fight violent insurgents, and they do not mind intimidating individual regime opponents who seem to undermine their country. However, they do not wish to oppose large numbers of peaceful citizens who have legitimate grievances against a repressive regime. Finally, military officers care about their legacies, and they do not want to be remembered as butchers of their own people.

**military leaders around the world are increasingly realizing that working for a dictator is a bad bargain over the long term**

The parts played by the Egyptian, Tunisian, Libyan, and Yemeni armed forces during the Arab Spring are therefore the latest chapter in a long story of democratic transitions in which the armed forces played



## BLAIR

a positive role, or at least a passive role, in bringing unpopular dictatorships to an end. Nevertheless, not all military leaders will abandon an authoritarian regime when protests arise. The sustained regime loyalty of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Bahraini armed forces and their willingness to gun down unarmed protestors in the streets are current examples. In Syria, too, as of this writing, the armed forces have largely supported the regime and moved against widespread protestors. In addition, democratic transitions are not irreversible, and some countries have moved back and forth between democratic and authoritarian rule, with the armed forces supporting both directions.

**over the last 30 years, armed forces have understood the advantages of democracy for their countries and for their military services**

Yet, over the last 30 years, armed forces around the world have understood the advantages of democracy for their countries and for their military services and have played an important role in bringing more representative governments to power.

The trend has been worldwide, taking different forms in different regions and countries. In East Asia from 1985 to 1988, Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, and Korea—all countries that had been ruled by dictators, many of whom were ex-military men backed by their armed forces—held elections that brought opposition leaders to power. The armed forces in all cases supported the transition, and since that time democratic civil-military relations have become more stable and democracy has become more strongly established.

Countries in Latin America have often alternated periods of military rule with democratic interludes since gaining their independence from colonial masters. However, beginning with Argentina in 1983, and followed by Brazil in 1985 and Chile in 1990, the largest countries in South America transitioned peacefully to democracy with the support of the armed forces. All three of these democratic governments have strengthened their legitimacy since those transitions. A large measure of accountability for past military abuses of power has been established, and civil-military relations appear to be on a firm footing.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, a large number of Eastern European countries made the transition to democracy. In many cases, with the assistance of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries, these governments overhauled their departments of defense and the armed forces that had been organized on the pattern of the Red army and dominated by their Soviet senior allies in the Warsaw Pact. Military leaders emerged who understood the role of their forces in a democracy, and they actively assisted newly elected and appointed government officials in wrenching transitions of their military services.

### Unfinished Business

There are still many countries and regions in which authoritarian governments persist and in which the armed forces support the regimes in power. As the nascent transition in Burma demonstrates, however, even in closed countries the winds of change can be felt. The global explosion of information, in which events in one part of the world are known quickly in its far corners, fan these

winds. Most dictatorial closed regimes fear these developments and seek to insulate their armed forces from them. Military officers in Iran and North Korea, for example, are forbidden from having any unsupervised official contact with their counterparts in democratic countries for fear they may contract infectious ideas of reform. China also limits the contact of its officers with outsiders, supervises it closely, fosters nationalistic sentiment within its officer corps, and at the same time holds out the prospect of a democratic future in order to keep the People's Liberation Army loyal to the Chinese Communist Party. African dictators maintain the loyalty of their armed forces using tribal ties, and they attempt to discredit democracy by associating it with the former colonial powers. Central Asian strongmen use the techniques they inherited from the Soviet Union to maintain party control over the armed forces.

However, military leaders in these still authoritarian countries are subject to the same factors that have influenced their counterparts around the world, and the pressures are increasing to withdraw support from dictators, welcome popular democratic movements, and make the transition to civil-military relations. These initiatives will turn the officers into true defenders of their people and members of an institution that is respected by their fellow citizens. There are positive steps that the developed democracies, and especially their armed forces, can take to influence military leaders in dictatorships to realize these initiatives.

### **Outside Military Influences on Democratic Transitions**

In almost all instances in which the armed forces of an autocratic country have

either initiated or supported a transition to an elected government, the most important factors have been internal and often unique to that country. In the case of the Argentine junta's departure from power in 1983, the causes included their economic mismanagement and loss of the Falklands/Malvinas war. The Turkish army was influenced by their Attaturk legacy. General-then-President Prem in Thailand had to put

**the most advanced, most skilled, and most respected armed forces in the world are those of the mature democratic countries**

down several military coups himself and faced strong popular pressure and royal support for the establishment of an elected government. General-then-President Ramos in the Philippines did not want to become another Ferdinand Marcos.

However, outside influences can play a part, and among those influences are the military forces of the mature democracies. Armed forces the world over have hundreds of points of contact, from attachés in their embassies to visits of delegations back and forth, to common participation in exercises and international military events, and to education and training in each other's countries. These interactions offer valuable opportunities to influence the officer corps and military leadership of dictatorial regimes to support democratic transitions in their own countries.

Military democratic influences are spread by example. The most advanced, most skilled, and most respected armed forces in the world are those of the mature democratic countries.

The military leaders of other countries look up to them and often seek to emulate them. Visiting officers from the People's Liberation Army often comment on the appearance, skills, and maturity of the noncommissioned officers in democratic countries. Officers from autocratic countries who have served in peacekeeping missions with officers from democracies are generally more progressive within their own armed forces when they return. While not every officer from an autocratic country who attends a course in a democratic country becomes an ardent democrat, what they observe gives them an important frame of reference. President Ramos was a graduate of West Point and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono completed studies at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. Several currently serving senior Egyptian generals are graduates of the École de Guerre in Paris. Sometimes individual officers and other officials from democratic countries have an opportunity to influence their counterparts in authoritarian countries directly, one-on-one.

**officers from autocratic countries who have served with officers from democracies are generally more progressive when they return**

All the developed democracies recognize the opportunities for influence that arise in military relations. Defense officials and military officers instinctively believe it is important to spread democratic values through their contacts with counterparts in countries that are autocratic or that are in transition from a dictatorship. Individuals and specific programs pursue the goal of influencing foreign military

services toward the advantages of democracy and the means to achieve it in their countries. Nevertheless, no country takes full advantage of its many points of contact with foreign armed forces to foster democratic development, and none has a systematic effort based on strong policy guidance and smart programs.

Part of the reason is historical. During the Cold War, the United States and other democracies often supported anticommunist dictators and their armed forces. While checking Soviet military power was essential, however, the decisive factor in ending the Cold War was the recognition by Soviet leaders that their autocratic system of government was inferior to the dynamic and free democratic system of the West. Since the Berlin Wall came down, there has been no national interest compelling enough in the advanced democracies to overrule their interest in widening the circle of democratic countries as the best policy to ensure that the world of the future will be friendly and share their democratic values. Neither the cooperation of autocratic countries against violent terrorist groups nor their export of petroleum is sufficiently important to prevent the advanced democracies from persuading the military leaders of those countries, current and future, that both their nations and their services would be better off in a more democratic form of government.

However, the habit of downplaying long-term important objectives at the expense of more immediate short-term goals persists. Currently, the policy priorities for military engagement with autocratic or transitional countries are to influence them to support overall and specific American (or British or French or Australian) policies to build capacity and interoperability for them to operate in a coalition. The greatest effort put into military relationships has been

combined exercises with the objective of increasing the interoperability of transitional forces and improving their skills, and arms sales to further enhance their capabilities. When the military relations with an autocratic regime have been put to larger purposes, it has often been to limit the impact of the regime's military because of its human rights abuses.

### **Building Military Support for Democratic Transitions**

The first step for the advanced democratic nations to take is simple but vital—to clearly state that the development of support for democracy is the top long-term policy objective for military relations with autocratic or transitional countries. At present, in the official policies of the advanced democracies, this objective is generally not specified, is not given a prominent place, or is hidden behind more neutral concepts such as “Security Sector Reform.” For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee, in its 2007 Ministerial Statement on security sector reform, never used the word “democracy.” Many of the specific objectives it established, such as “effective governance, oversight and accountability systems,” are characteristics of the armed forces in democratic countries, but in the statement they are not put into the larger framework of democracy. The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review by the U.S. Department of Defense listed five “operational benefits” for security cooperation with other countries. Number five was “influencing the development of foreign military institutions and their roles in democratic societies.” These elliptical allusions to supporting democratic development do not offer the solid foundation needed for defense officials

and military officers to provide guidance and design sound programs.

With a clear policy foundation in place, defense officials and military officers can design and carry out sound programs. Despite the lack of clear guidance, many programs have been developed that have proved effective in influencing the armed forces of autocratic or transitional countries to support democratic development.

**one of the best opportunities to influence foreign officers from autocratic countries is when they come to educational institutions in democratic countries**

### **International Military Education**

One of the best opportunities to influence foreign officers from autocratic countries is when they come to the military colleges and other educational institutions in democratic countries. These courses range from a full academic year at a service command or staff college to a few weeks for a specialized technical course. Other countries will often send their best and brightest. For example, some 35 officers have attended the Army War College and returned home to become chiefs in their armies.

The advantage to a country, of educating international students, is well recognized. However, there is more that can be done in the education of international military officers to give them an appreciation for the foundational elements and advantages of a democratic system.

The curricula for international officers in the command and staff colleges of most democratic countries include explanations of

the civil-military system in the host country. In the case of the United States, for example, there are classes on the role of the U.S. Armed Forces as established by the U.S. Constitution. It would be much more powerful and relevant to international officers if the lectures and discussions covered the many ways in which countries achieve the same foundational elements of a democratic civil-military structure: political control of the armed forces; legislative authorization of budgets and oversight of activities; government control of the promotion of senior officers; judicial authority over military activities; and press access to military activities. Exposed to examples drawn from a wide variety of countries, international students from authoritarian countries would find it much easier to imagine how their own countries might evolve to a democratic system.

**international students should meet with officers and noncommissioned officers who have completed military careers and gone on to succeed in other fields**

For senior military officers the world over, one of the most important professional issues is their relationship to their political superiors. They are expected to provide their best professional advice and then to carry out legal orders. In democracies, the worst that can happen to a senior officer if his advice is not welcome is that he is replaced. If the order is not legal or he believes it is wrong, he can resign. He retires with his pension. In autocracies a general who provides unwelcome advice or refuses to obey an order can be imprisoned or worse. Seminar study in war college courses of the responsibilities of senior officers to their

political superiors, and how to handle illegal or dangerous orders, would be very effective in reinforcing the ethos of loyalty to the nation, not to an individual or party.

Surveys of international graduates of command courses in the United Kingdom and the United States make it clear that they are influenced as much by what they observe outside their classrooms as what they are taught inside them. It is important that in field trips around their host countries, the international students learn about the full range of organizations and groups that interact with the armed forces. The democracies generally take better care of their veterans than autocratic countries do, so visits to veterans hospitals and clinics would be valuable; it would be eye-opening to many international students to talk with the many volunteer organizations that have sprung up in democratic countries to help veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan: the Yellow Ribbon Society in the United States and the Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees in the United Kingdom, for example. International students should talk to military journalists from the media about the role of a free press in writing not just about the successes and positive accomplishments of the armed forces, but about mistakes and worse. It was civilian correspondents who broke the stories of My Lai and Abu Ghraib and of major cost overruns and performance shortfalls in military hardware programs. Although these stories caused hardship at the time, their final result was to strengthen the armed forces. International students should meet with officers and noncommissioned officers who have completed military careers and gone on to succeed in other fields, from high school teaching to corporate management. The overall objective of outside programs should be to expose

U.S. Air Force C-17 flies over pyramids of Giza Plateau as part of USCENTCOM biennial multinational exercise Bright Star



DOD (Jacob N. Bailey)

international military students to the complex texture of relationships of the armed forces in a democracy, relationships that ensure that those forces play their appropriate role of protecting their country's citizens, and in turn being understood and rewarded for their service.

### Training

The armed forces of most countries find the greatest opportunity for interaction during exercises. These range from large multilateral exercises like Cobra Gold in Thailand, Eagle Resolve in the Persian Gulf, and Bright Star in Egypt to small bilateral encounters involving a few dozen participants. The objective of most of these exercises is to establish or enhance the ability of the units involved to work together—to practice common procedures and communications and to iron out interoperability problems.

when senior U.S. officers visited Indonesia in the late 1990s, they were thoroughly prepared regarding the East Timor crisis

Most exercises involving the forces of established democracies and authoritarian or transitional countries are politically neutral peace operations. The scenarios range from search and rescue efforts to disaster relief to peacekeeping. These scenarios offer the opportunity to reinforce the fundamental commitment of military forces to protect and rescue civilian citizens from violence and danger. It is this commitment that will prevent military forces from carrying out the orders of a repressive regime to put down peaceful protests by its citizens. Too often international exercises move quickly to the operational phases,

exercising military functions such as combined helicopter extractions and roadblock procedures. Emphasis needs to be placed on an initial phase in which the legal basis of the military action in the particular scenario is established: international law and custom for search and rescue; a host country invitation for disaster relief; or a United Nations resolution for peacekeeping operations. The objective is to reinforce the concept that all military operations must have a legal basis. In the initial planning phase, emphasis also needs to be placed on civil-military relationships, underscoring that military operations take place within a larger political context—for example, that military units operate in support of civilian-led government disaster relief agencies and that peacekeeping operations support political agreements reached between governments. Finally, the initial planning phase of these exercises needs to emphasize the legal basis and control of the use of military force in the exercise scenario. Should troops be armed or unarmed? Under what circumstances can force be used? In a disaster relief operation, can force be used, for example, against looters? In a peacekeeping operation, can force be used only in self-defense or can it be used against an armed faction that is breaking the conditions of a ceasefire?

In this initial planning phase, the objective is to convey to the officers and noncommissioned officers of autocratic countries the concepts of the legal use of force, of proportional use of force, and the subordination and control of the use of force to political direction. These concepts will cause them to question their own regimes over time.

The same concepts can be reinforced during the later phases of the exercise by appropriate selection of events within the scenario and



by the after action review, which is the final phase of all exercises in which the performance of the units is evaluated and issues that are exposed are discussed.

### Conferences and Visits

The scale of meetings, conferences, and visits among the armed forces of the established democracies and autocratic or transitional countries is vast. When the author was Commander in Chief, Pacific Command, the staff prepared a list of the visits scheduled over the course of a year with China, and the list ran on for pages.

The great majority of these interactions are among functional counterparts in the armed forces—military doctors visit their counterparts and logisticians have conferences; so do special forces officers. Army, Navy, and Air Force chiefs consider it part of their duties to visit counterparts around the world.

The preparation of officers from the established democracies for these interactions is generally of two types: functional and political. First, their staffs work to identify safe common professional topics that they and their bosses can discuss with counterparts. The objective is to establish a common professional bond. Second, there is preparation on how to handle the current political issues between their countries. When the author and other senior U.S. officers visited Indonesia in the late 1990s, for example, they were thoroughly prepared regarding the latest developments in the East Timor crisis. What officers from democratic countries are not thoroughly prepared for by their staffs or their experience to discuss, however, are the civil-military issues in the particular autocratic countries they are visiting. They probably know the order of battle of an autocratic country, but they generally do

not know enough to engage their counterparts on issues such as the internal security role of the armed forces, the relationship with the intelligence and internal security services, the sources of funding for the armed forces, or the recent history of the armed forces' relationship with the regime. It is discussions about such topics, not in open meetings or seminars but during private conversations, that can open the minds of officers in autocratic countries to the possibilities for progress in their countries toward the more democratic forms of government that would give their services more stable and honorable positions.

### Conclusion

These examples for improving the effectiveness of military education and training programs, exercises, conferences, and visits are only a few of the ways that the advanced democratic countries can focus their interactions with autocratic armed forces on the objective of supporting democratic transitions. There are literally thousands of points of contact among the armed forces of the democracies and autocratic countries, and all of them offer opportunities for influence. Once this objective is established clearly by the governments of the advanced democracies, their extremely capable defense officials and military officers will devise many ways to carry out the mission.

The events of the Arab Spring are the latest in a long line of failures of dictatorships, stretching from Latin America across East Asia and Central and Eastern Europe. The Arab Spring also reemphasizes the centrality of the armed forces in popular protests against dictatorships and whether countries transition to democratic forms of government or revert to rule by repressive regimes. The

## BLAIR

democracies of the world have no more important objective than the successful transition of dictatorships to democracies. The armed forces of democratic countries can be even more positive and effective influences on the counterparts in autocratic countries if they are given the policy guidance and mission. **PRISM**

# Concept Failure?

## COIN, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Theory

BY COLIN S. GRAY

*Theory should cast a steady light on all phenomena so that we can more easily recognize and eliminate the weeds that always spring from ignorance; it should show how one thing is related to another, and keep the important and the unimportant separate.<sup>1</sup>*

The general theory of strategy, which explains the structure, content, and working of the strategy function, has a domain of intellectual authority that is universal and eternal. This logical precedence over the wide variety of historically unique strategic phenomena means that the theory can provide order and discipline to help those who argue about particular ideas and their practical expression in action. This article is a modest attempt to bring general strategic theory to the intellectual feast of rival ideas and doctrines about COIN, or should it be counterinsurgency, that continues to excite combative theorists.<sup>2</sup>

By way of historical placement of argument, I am pleased to acknowledge my debts to a few scholars whose arguments have combined to help spark this particular effort of mine: Antulio Echevarria, Sebastian Gorka and David Kilcullen, and David Ucko.<sup>3</sup> They bear no responsibility for my argument here, but I find much of their recent reasoning to be distinctly compatible with my own. In fact, it is my hope that this article will deserve to be regarded as usefully complementary to their writings.

COIN is neither a concept nor can it be a strategy. Instead, it is simply an acronymic descriptor of a basket of diverse activities intended to counter an insurgency. COIN cannot be debated intelligently as a general and generic project any more than can war and its warfare. COIN effort is a subset of effort in war, and—save in moral context—it makes no sense to attempt to argue about either, save with specific reference to particular cases. We might as well try to debate taxation. Its known general evil has to be somewhat offset by the contestable claims advanced for the good that it should generate—security, social justice, and so forth. It is tempting to suggest that strategic theorists should accept the same golden rule as that which helps discipline the medical

Dr. Colin S. Gray is Professor of International Politics at the University of Reading, United Kingdom.

profession—“first, do no harm.” But to approach the recent COIN and counterterrorism debate with that candidate injunction in mind would be sociologically naïve because of the career dynamics that incentivize herd behavior with faddish and fashionable conceptualization.

It is my contention in this article that the United States and the world order values that it seeks to advance and protect have been harmed by a failure of conceptualization pertaining to COIN and counterterrorism. However, hastily I must add, there is a serious danger that the rhythm of debate will encourage an indiscriminate massacre of both guilty and innocent concepts. This article argues that COIN per se is not, and plausibly cannot possibly be, a concept that has failed. Among several problems with such a charge would be the nontrivial actuality that COIN is not a concept. The fact that many people who need to know better—and could know better, were they educated in strategy—think inappropriately about COIN is unfortunate and harmful. But we should not permit such conceptual abuse to enjoy an authority it does not deserve. The relevant challenge here is neither to bury nor to praise COIN (with apologies to William Shakespeare), but rather to help ensure that it survives with minimum damage as a necessary option-set in America’s national security strategy quiver.

**COIN per se is not, and plausibly cannot possibly be, a concept that has failed**

National security policy and the strategy to implement it are indeed complex and can pose genuinely “wicked” dilemmas admitting of no attractive choices. Nonetheless, they are not akin to quantum theory. The American challenge with COIN, counterterrorism, and

affiliated issues does demand some granularity in comprehension if decisions and actions are to be wisely taken and pursued. However, we have access to a general theory of strategy, supported by a general theory of politics and statecraft, that draws on 2,500 years of thought and experience.<sup>4</sup> The COIN debaters of today have powerful conceptual allies, if only they know to employ them prudently. As the great Prussian Carl von Clausewitz wrote, “Theory exists so that one need not start afresh each time sorting out the material and plowing through it, but will find it to hand and in good order.”<sup>5</sup> Clausewitz advised also that “all theories, however, must stick to categories of phenomena and can never take account of a truly unique case. This must be left to judgment and talent.”<sup>6</sup> It is my argument that the judgment and talent required to cope with COIN cases, extant and potential, needs to benefit from the education that sound general theory can provide to those willing and able to learn. A major advantage that should be secured by some serious education in strategy is a greater ease than before in identifying shoddy concepts that are not sufficiently fit for the purposes their advocate-owners claim.

Of course, this article is about Iraq, Afghanistan, and post-both imbroglios. But it is about them only in the sense that it seeks to clarify and help explain how to think usefully about these painful episodes and the others that lurk for sure in America’s future strategic history. This article is “policy science,” designed to address the structure of the issue area of COIN/counterterrorism, not policy or strategy advocacy. America’s recent record of thought and action about COIN is mainly, though not entirely, poor; hence, this article. What is particularly frustrating is recognition that the conceptual failure is all but wholly gratuitous and should have been avoidable. Americans in

the 2000s went to war, and by and large have remained conceptually wounded. The irony in this persisting condition has not been lost on American military historian Brian Linn. In his persuasive words:

*Even before [the global war on terror], the defense community was in the midst of a vibrant debate over whether the nature of war itself had changed. Advocates offered the prospect of a glittering future through a “Revolution in Military Affairs,” “Military Transformation,” and a “New American Way of War.” But their voices were only some, if perhaps the most strident, in a much larger discussion. Others defended the relevance of military philosophers such as Henri Jomini and Carl von Clausewitz, while still others advocated what General Wesley K. Clark termed “modern war—limited, carefully constrained in geography, scope, weaponry and effects.” The debate, like the defense community, overflowed with buzzwords—*asymmetric conflict, fourth-generation warfare, shock and awe, full spectrum dominance*—many of which quickly became passé. And with some significant exceptions, much of this debate confined itself to hypothetical threats, to the relative merits of weapons systems, and to new tactical organizations.<sup>7</sup>*

Linn proceeded to observe that “this failure of military intellectuals to agree on a concept of war might seem surprising, given that virtually everyone in the armed forces claims to be a *warfighter* and every few years at least one of the services proclaims its intentions to make each member a *warrior*.”<sup>8</sup> The failure that Linn noticed was not of the kind that might occur when a number of powerful rival concepts are

contending for intellectual primacy. Instead, there was failure to agree, which he registered; in addition, there was failure to produce a dominant idea worthy of hegemonic status, and finally there was failure of the kind signaled in the famous Gresham’s law, wherein the 16<sup>th</sup>-century financier claimed that currency of lower value tended to drive that of higher value out of circulation. By analogy with Sir Thomas’s law, the plethora of adjectivally modified concepts of contemporary war and warfare has driven older and simpler concepts and theory almost into hiding. “Thucydides (or Sun Tzu, or Clausewitz) was mainly right!” is not as exciting and salable as a narrative of revolutionary change, even when the change must entail some alchemy (for example, war allegedly changing its nature; or human behavior suddenly, post-Cold War, reflecting the benign consequences of a normative revolution that denies repression as an effective domestic policy option, and suchlike attractive fantasies).

The conceptual tool needed to explain conflict phenomena is ready to hand, but people seem not to know what it is or how to use it. As a result, a thousand weeds of strategic theory flourish, and the only authority is official endorsement and use, which typically is transient. The classical canon of strategic thought, although widely praised and quoted in fragmentary wisdom nuggets, plainly has no significant intellectual disciplinary role. All of this is unfortunate because much of the recent COIN debate fundamentally is nonsense; it rests upon false or misleading ideas, indeed literally upon misconceptions. A further irony of this quintessentially ironic subject is the incontestable fact that the cost of formal education in strategy is trivial compared with the costs incurred for reasons of ignorance of its nature and working on the part of ill-educated practitioners.<sup>9</sup>

Lest there be any misunderstanding, I am not going to attempt to argue that an education in strategic theory will serve like the philosopher's stone postulated in medieval alchemy to be able to turn the base metal of failure or impasse into the gold of strategic success. Rather, it is my claim only that there is available a relatively simple general theory of strategy (and war) that transcends and conceptually reorganizes such subordinate subjects as COIN and counterterrorism. This general theory, far from retiring COIN theory, actually saves it from the misconceptions of overzealous if undereducated advocate theorist-practitioners. So what is my argument?

**COIN debate would benefit if the debaters took a refresher course in the basics of strategy**

### Argument

If this debate about COIN is to be reset along more productive lines than those typically pursued in the often heated and bad-tempered exchanges of recent times, it is necessary to place some reliance on the conceptual tools that strategic theory provides. Unsurprisingly, in its several forms that theory yields what Clausewitz specified: it sorts out what needs sorting. There is much that should be debated about COIN, but the controversy is not helpful for national security if the structure and functioning of the subject matter, suitably defined, are not grasped and gripped with intellectual discipline. To that end, what follows is a nine-part argument intended to make more sense of the not-so-great COIN debate triggered by the unmistakable evidence of confusion, frustration, and

either failure or unsatisfactorily fragile success in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is neither policy nor strategy advocacy, but generically it is advocacy of policy (and its politics) and strategy, properly employed.

**Formal education in strategy is not an adequate substitute for experience or talent and aptitude, but it should help.** COIN debate would benefit if the debaters took a refresher course in the basics of strategy. Many fallacies and inadequate arguments about COIN in Afghanistan, for instance, are avoidable if their proponents were willing to seek and were able to receive help from theory. Harold Winton offers useful guidance when he identifies five functions for competent theory: such theory “defines, categorizes, explains, connects, and anticipates.”<sup>10</sup> About what does theory perform those functions? The answer, which for strategy is the equivalent of  $E = mc^2$ , is ends, ways, means, and (with caveats) assumptions. If a strategist's narrative performs well on this formula, he has indeed cracked the code that enables—though it cannot guarantee—strategic success. The strategist needs to understand his subject, which is not COIN or counterterrorism; it is strategy for his particular challenge in COIN or counterterrorism. It is hard to find compensation for a lack of case-specific local knowledge, but it is even harder, and can be impossible, to compensate for weakness in understanding of strategy.

There is a classical canon of authors worth reading for their contributions, both intended and not, to the general theory of strategy. This theorist has reshaped and assembled the theory in the form of dicta (formal statements that are not quite principles and definitely not laws).<sup>11</sup> Rather than test readers' patience with a recital of my dicta, here I capture much of

U.S. Marine greets local children during partnered security patrol with ANA soldiers in Helmand Province



DOD

their meanings and implications by offering a list of “strategists’ questions,” some of which, with some amendments, I have borrowed with gratitude from the late Philip Crowl, followed by my own redrafting of the now long-traditional “Principles of War” as a set of Principles of War that I believe more suitably serves the declared purpose. First, the following are the strategists’ questions:

- ❖ What is it all about? What are the political stakes, and how much do they matter to us?
- ❖ So what? What will be the strategic effect of the sundry characters of behavior that we choose to conduct?
- ❖ Is the strategy selected tailored well enough to meet our political objectives?
- ❖ What are the probable limits of our (military) power as a basket of complementary agencies to influence and endeavor to control the enemy’s will?
- ❖ How could the enemy strive to thwart us?
- ❖ What are our alternative courses of action/inaction? What are their prospective costs and benefits?
- ❖ How robust is our home front?
- ❖ Does the strategy we prefer today draw prudently and honestly upon the strategic education that history can provide?
- ❖ What have we overlooked?



The intention above is not to provide an exhaustive basis for strategic enquiry, but rather to capture the spirit as well as most of the content of a properly skeptical strategist's concerns. My second list is designed to complement the longstanding wisdom in the Principles of War (mass, objective, offensive, surprise, economy of force, maneuver, unity of command, security, and simplicity)—which actually are principles of warfare—with some “new,” though hardly novel, principles that are more fit for their purpose. The Principles of War (new style) reads as follows, in barest form of expression:<sup>12</sup>

war requires the ability to adapt to failure and to cope well enough with the consequences of chaos, friction, and the unintended consequences of actions

- ❖ War is a political act conducted for political reasons.
- ❖ There is more to war than warfare.
- ❖ There is more to strategy than military strategy.
- ❖ War is about peace, and sometimes vice versa.
- ❖ Style in warfighting has political consequences.
- ❖ War is caused, shaped, and driven by its contexts.
- ❖ War is a contest of political wills.
- ❖ “War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale”:<sup>13</sup> take the enemy into account.
- ❖ War is a cultural undertaking.
- ❖ War requires the ability to adapt to failure and to cope well enough with the

consequences of chaos, friction, and the unintended consequences of actions.

These new-style Principles of War complement, rather than substitute for, the extant principles that, as noted already, are really principles only of warfare. Considered as part of the canon of dicta, precepts, and the like that comprises strategy's general theory, these bundles of questions and principles serve as potent intellectual auxiliary legions in aid of education in strategy. Their purpose, meaning their practical value, is to stimulate and encourage a strategic sense in politically motivated behavior. It is this strategic sense that is so vital if the various levels of activity that we can identify as politics/policy, grand strategy, military strategy, operations, and tactics are to work coherently in mutually supporting ways in pursuit of common goals. Because strategy is an artistic social science, we do not need to demand that its theory is built on the basis only of nuggets of wisdom that are testable and therefore demonstrably correct for any and every occasion.

***The merit in COIN cannot sensibly be posed as a general question.*** It is beyond argument that insurgency has been a constant, indeed a perennial, feature of strategic history. Logically, it has to follow that counterinsurgency must have like historical provenance. Revolt, rebellion, insurrection, civil war, whatever the preferred terms of art, are a phenomenon woven into the history of the fabric of human societies and their politics. It may seem to make sense to classify a particular body of historical experience as, in effect, “what we mean by counterinsurgency,” and it could be true that some similarity in contexts between cases does allow for an understanding that extends beyond an individual case. Gorka and Kilcullen claim that COIN, as the concept typically has been employed and understood of recent years, relies

upon a data set that is far too exclusive in historical and other domains to be sound.<sup>14</sup> They are probably correct in their criticism of COIN theory, at least as recent theory has been interpreted. By analogy, the leading contemporary COIN theory provides an arguable cosmology limited only to the recent history of our solar system rather than to the whole universe of which our system is but a minor part.

It is not my intention for this article to join battle on COIN “vs.” counterinsurgency and suchlike debate. Rather, this analysis offers what amounts functionally to the services of an intellectual policeman in the form of strategy. It is probably true—certainly it is fairly plausible—to argue that disputes about tactics for COIN should be resolvable in the light of the strategic sense advocated here. The framework for thought, decision, and action provided by the elemental formula of ends, ways, and means—with assumptions—enables strategic sense to operate and endeavor to shape events. Whether or not an insurgency should be opposed is not a general question. The answer always must depend on the specific circumstances. This is not so much a matter of COIN doctrine or techniques, including the military; rather, it is first and foremost a political issue. As a general rule, domestic insurgencies must be countered. For reasons of national security and public order, as well as personal survival, established authority has a duty to attempt to counter insurgents. Whether or not it is sensible for an outside polity to intervene in other polities’ insurgencies is a question that can only be posed in the particular. Mastery and employment of the strategic frame of thought and action should go a long way toward the generation of prudent decisions. However, since chance and friction are ever apt to rule in matters of war and warfare as the Prussian insisted, there can never be a

guarantee that even high rectitude in strategic method will be rewarded with success.<sup>15</sup>

*In COIN, all war and its warfare are about politics no more or less than in strategic behavior applied to other missions.* Politics is a necessary, though not sufficient, defining descriptor of war. This point is a simple one, but apparently it is easy to misunderstand. Because war and its warfare are about politics, it does not follow that war is politics: it is not. It is a fallacy to believe that counterinsurgency is activity of a species different from interstate war in regard to its nature. Both interstate and (counter) insurgent warfare are owned by politics. There are some important differences between interstate and intrastate war, but degree of political meaning is not among the distinctions. Because it is in the very nature of war for it to be about politics, it is not possible for some kinds of wars to be more political than others. The political nature of the defining motivation and consequences of warfare is not impacted by the character or the intensity of the fighting. Scholars who seek to emphasize the critical importance of political factors—correctly in my view—err seriously if they come to believe that their approach to counterinsurgency is inherently more political than that of debate opponents who lean toward a more actively military engagement. What is happening in the contemporary COIN debate is evidence of conceptual confusion.

War is war; it is prosecuted in a greater or lesser part by military force, and it is always, and by definition, about politics. Ironically, it is not uncommon for the two poles in this controversy to be making a like conceptual error. Specifically, one pole of opinion gravitates around the fallacy that an insurgency has to be countered predominantly by a political grand strategy because, in truth, it is really a political war (about legitimacy and authority). The

other pole of opinion gravitates around the fallacy that an insurgency is in its most essential, certainly most pressing, nature a military challenge. The second approach argues that if we win the warfare in the counterinsurgent war, favorable politics inexorably will follow the military success that provides security to the population. This second view is substantially—though not wholly—let alone reliably, correct, insofar as we can draw upon history for empirical support. But both approaches implicitly

**theoretical elaboration of the claimed structure of allegedly different kinds of wars is usually an example of conceptual construction on sand**

claim authority from what is a conceptual error about the nature of war and strategy. Again, both camps of opinion are correct in the core of their set of beliefs. On the one hand, those who unwisely deemphasize the importance of the warfare in countering insurgents nonetheless are correct in their promotion of the importance of politics. On the other hand, those who inappropriately demote the relative significance of the political in favor of effort to win the warfare are correct in their insistence on the enemy's military defeat.

Means and methods in counterinsurgency must vary from case to case since each conflict has distinctive features. Conceptual creativity that sees the light of day in wars that allegedly are irregular, hybrid, complex, difficult, fourth generation, and the rest of the products of fertile imaginations must not be permitted to obscure the simple and usable verities that war is war and it is always about politics. Theoretical elaboration of the claimed structure of allegedly different kinds

of wars is usually an example of conceptual construction on sand.

***It is not sensible to categorize wars according to the believed predominant combat style of one of the belligerents.*** Guerrilla-style warfare is potentially universal and, on the historical evidence, for excellent reasons has been a favored military method of the weaker combatant eternally. There are no such historical phenomena as guerrilla wars. Rather, there have been countless wars wherein guerrilla tactics have been employed, sometimes by both sides. To define a war according to a tactical style is about as foolish as definition according to weaponry. For example, it is not conducive of understanding to conceive of tank warfare when the subject of interest is warfare with tanks and so forth, typically, if not quite always, in the context of combined arms. It is important conceptually not to allow the muscle to dominate the brain. Tanks, cavalry, and nuclear weapons are provided with strategic and political meaning only by the warfare that they serve (or might serve) and by the war that licenses that warfare. And the war, of course, is provided its purpose and its license to unleash harm by politics. We need not be a disciple of Clausewitz to follow this reasoning, but if we are not, we should be.

Regardless of our position regarding rival emphases in good strategic counterinsurgency effort as between military styles and between military and civilian initiatives, what we are seeking to counter is not the insurgents' tactics, but rather their strategic meaning for political effect. A key to this point is to be found in Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, when he asserts persuasively that "what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy."<sup>16</sup> All strategy is done by tactical action, but a heavy focus on tactics is ever liable to lead us astray from the strategic plot and its political context. A

particular security menace may well have the dominant current character of a guerrilla style in military behavior, but that contemporary tactical fact should not be allowed to define the conflict for us.

**Counterinsurgency is not a subject that has integrity in and of itself.** Because war is a political, and only instrumentally a military, phenomenon, we must be careful lest we ambush ourselves by a conceptual confusion that inflates COIN to the status of an idea and activity that purportedly has stand-alone, context-free merit. Whether or not COIN should be attempted must always be a policy decision for strategy that is made in a political process. It is highly misleading to write about COIN as if it were a technique, a basket of operational and tactical ways and means, utterly divorced from specific historical political circumstances. There is and can be no “right way” to do COIN, though there are several ways most probably that might be right enough for a particular case in an imperfect world. To connect, or reconnect, with the fundamentals of the subject under discussion here, the dominant policy questions have to be: “Should we attempt to help counter this insurgency?”—and, if the answer is yes, “How should we do so?” This seemingly simplistic approach is useful because it frames the issue area in desirable width, depth, and context.<sup>17</sup> Our counterinsurgency playbook should not be confined to recent or current COIN method wisdom, but rather ought to draw upon the full range of our strategic understanding and of historical experience far beyond our own.<sup>18</sup> This is not necessarily to condemn contemporary beliefs on best practice in COIN; it is only to argue that decisions to counter or not to counter an insurgency should not gravitate precipitately to essentially tactical matters of COIN

method, at the likely expense of strategic reasoning and direction. To be blunt, the most effective strategy to counter an insurgency may be one that makes little use of COIN tactics. It will depend upon the circumstance (context).

**it is misleading to write about COIN as if it were a technique, a basket of operational and tactical ways and means, utterly divorced from specific historical political circumstances**

This is not to deny that there are some well-identified items of typically good practice in the countering of an insurgency with its necessarily guerrilla style of operations.<sup>19</sup> The good practice manual is not quite a set of principles or rules, but it always provided that policy (politics) and strategy demand that insurgent guerrillas—and terrorists, often the same—be opposed tactically in directly effective, combat-style matching mode. Then there is no structural difficulty with the endeavor. Strategy has political effect through the strategic effect of its enabling tactical action. We need to accept the reality of the wide diversity in character among phenomena that fit the definition of insurgency and the extensive range of grand strategic methods and means that may be employed in opposition to it. Such acceptance should lead to an appreciation that the strategic and political contexts must not be conceptually demoted to walk-on sponsoring roles as the inadvertent consequence of an inappropriate privileging of COIN tactics.

**Insurgents can lose the warfare, but still win the war. In contrast, if the political incumbents lose the warfare, they lose the war.** There is a well known, though apocryphal, maxim (often attributed to Sun Tzu) that claims, “Strategy without tactics is the slowest



Afghan students listen to town elders at shura about growth of education in Garmisr District

DOD (Reece Lodder)

route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.” It would be imprudent to assert that a state can never win a war against insurgents by virtue of winning the warfare—*hardly ever* would be the way to modify the claim—but it is safe to predict that if the state loses the warfare, it will have lost the war. There is much more to war than its warfare, or fighting, but the insurgents’ cause is more permissive of military setbacks than is that of the state. This argument, which may seem a little convoluted to some, even perverse perhaps, targets an important issue in recent COIN debate and speaks to an enduring matter of the greatest significance to counterinsurgents. Today, it is orthodox to endorse the mantra or chant “we cannot kill our way to victory,” though the targeted killings and assassinations in recent years of insurgents and terrorists in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan cast some doubt on the operational authority of this still popular thesis. Variants of the chant claim that counterinsurgency is really all about protecting the people, *not* killing insurgents. After all, live insurgents can be a source of vital intelligence, and if “turned” and apparently apostate, they help generate strategic effect for COIN. The rather polarized debate about the relative importance of the military, as contrasted with the political contribution to effective COIN, has not been especially enlightening. This is one of those difficult cases where both rival core arguments are right. Can they be reconciled is the pertinent question.

Even though war and its warfare are about politics, it does not (quite) follow that the winning of (most of) the warfare guarantees the winning of the war. Such winning can be understood to mean that the victorious side largely dictates the terms that it prefers for an armistice and then a

peace settlement, and is in a position to police and enforce a postwar order that in the main reflects its values and choices. History tells us that it can be as hard, if not harder, to make peace than it is to make war successfully. Former belligerents do not always receive and enjoy politically the postwar conditions that they would seem to merit for their relative efforts and degree of success or failure, let alone for the moral worth of their sacrifice (a dubious characterization if ever there was one, notwithstanding its popularity). It is nearly always strategically harmful to lose in the fighting, though it is true that a heroically suicidal blood sacrifice (the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin, for one example, or Thermopylae, more arguably) can help propel a cause.

With respect to COIN, military setbacks and a growing public conviction that ever greater defeats loom in the fairly near future are likely to be much more deadly to established authority than to its armed foes. If insurgents are beaten in the typically small-scale combats of largely guerrilla-style warfare, if they suffer damaging loss of political agents to the security services, they usually have the strategic option of retreating, repairing, recovering, and returning when time has wrought its hoped-for magic by improving the context for violent action, and they will try again, bloodied but possibly wiser. The insurgents' political cause, or causes, can survive a period of strategic weakness promoted by military defeats whereas the government cannot. Political legitimacy is in part a matter of public confidence earned by providing credible evidence that the future is "ours and not theirs."

This is not to claim crudely that all people bandwagon with those who are anticipated with confidence to be the winners, but it is to argue that a prime way in which public support is lost

is by looking like the loser in the fighting. For incumbent political authority, there is no way back from an unfolding military defeat, excepting foreign intervention that often only postpones the evil hour (as in South Vietnam in 1965). Insurgents who are beaten are not usually literally annihilated. If the fighting has been guerrilla in style, the defeats are likely to be tactically painful and certainly strategically and politically damaging to reputation, but nonetheless not fatal to the prospects for ultimate victory. We might recall with advantage these words by Mao Zedong: "The strategy of guerrilla warfare is manifestly unlike that employed in orthodox operations. There is in guerrilla warfare no such thing as a decisive battle."<sup>20</sup>

**if we are not willing to pay what winning is expected to cost, then we ought not to be fighting at all**

*Population-centric COIN will not succeed if the politics are weak, but neither is it likely to succeed if the insurgents can retreat to repair, rally, and recover in a cross-border sanctuary.* Insurgency and its countering inalienably are simultaneously both political and military—and social-cultural, inter alia—projects. There is some porosity between the political and the military, but fungibility is not unbounded. Military success should fuel political reputation, but we ought not to expect military failure to find adequate compensation in residual political commitment. Because of the extraordinary difficulty that regular armed forces tend to have bringing to battle insurgents who usually are obliged prudently to fight in guerrilla mode, it is close to essential that guerrilla fighters be denied cross-border sanctuary. It can be argued, in theory, that since COIN is war



about the people, primarily it has to be effective “amongst the people,” where they live.<sup>21</sup> COIN effort that is succeeding need not, therefore, chase insurgents into distant and sparsely populated areas because there the guerrillas will be strategically marginalized and politically irrelevant. This reasoning is not without all merit, but nonetheless it is not thoroughly convincing.

By analogy, an insurgency that has cross-border sanctuaries is akin to a cancer that is either in temporary remission or only lightly active. Afghanistan in the 2000s offers what has to be a candidate classic object lesson in why cross-border sanctuaries ought not to be tolerated strategically in COIN. There should be no need to reemphasize the point by citing North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in the 1960s and 1970s. Of course, there are always reasons, typically good ones, why it would be costly to strive seriously to foreclose on insurgent sanctuaries. However, to anticipate and even predict some

much more political than it is military, that it is not really war with warfare, set themselves up for strategic ambush by the dynamics and “grammar” of the military dimension to strategic history.<sup>22</sup> There is an integrity to military strategy and tactics that is not idly to be mocked by the adjectival modifiers with which some theorists attempt to corral and control violence. Irregular war is still war, as is limited war and the countering of insurgents in war with some warfare. Sanctuary denial is no guarantee of victory, but nothing else is either. However, seemingly politically prudent decisions to tolerate cross-border sanctuaries are plain evidence of strategic weakness and are more often than not a fatal mistake.

**COIN requires tactical competence, but it is hugely subordinate to politics, policy, and strategy.** Tactical challenges must have some strategic effect, but tactics comprise a problem-set with which armed forces and other agencies of state should be well enough trained and equipped to cope. Adequate defense planning provides forces that are sufficiently adaptable and flexible—perhaps not for current needs, though certainly for tomorrow, not excluding challenges that are neither anticipated nor predicted. The principal and driving issues for the United States with respect to counterinsurgency are when to do it and when not, and how to attempt to do it strategically. Policy and strategy choices are literally critical and determinative. The choice of strategy has to be (or perhaps *should* be) driven, certainly shaped, by the political goals of policy that yield meaning to the project. Similarly, the tactical means and their behavior as an agency for strategy have to be directed by the character of political ambition in the policy goals. All too often, COIN effort is debated in its tactical particulars, while the political and strategic assumptions that

the principal and driving issues for the United States with respect to counterinsurgency are when to do it and when not, and how to attempt to do it strategically

adverse consequences of sanctuary denial is not to close the strategic issue. Should the benefits of antisubsanctuary action not be judged sufficient to offset the probable costs, then it is likely to be the case that the insurgency ought not to be countered. The logic in this argument is to the effect that if we are not willing to pay what winning is expected to cost, then we ought not to be fighting at all. Obviously, this logic applies to contexts of conflict wherein sanctuaries are believed to be a critical asset for the insurgents. Those who persuade themselves that COIN is



ultimately are responsible for many of those particulars persist unprobed and unchallenged. Because the future cannot be foreseen in detail, it is only reasonable to anticipate that the course of events will reveal some weakness in extant assumptions, strategy, and tactical practices. Nonetheless, much that ought to be determined by choice of policy ends and strategic ways, instead, by default, is addressed at the tactical level. Tactical errors or setbacks enforced by a clever enemy should be corrected or offset tactically and need not menace the integrity of policy and strategy. COIN may not be rocket science or quantum theory, but no one has ever argued that it is easy.

***If success in COIN requires prior, or at least temporally parallel, success in nation-building, it is foredoomed to failure.*** Nations cannot be built. Most especially they cannot be built by well-meaning but culturally arrogant foreign social scientists, no matter how well intentioned and methodologically sophisticated. A *nation* (or *community*) is best defined as a people who think of themselves as one. Nations build themselves by and through historical experience. Cultural understanding is always useful and its absence can be a lethal weakness, but some lack of comprehension is usual in war.<sup>23</sup> War, warfare, and strategy are transcultural in their natures and typically are substantially transcultural in their variable characters also. Common humanity, common situation, and fairly common technologies unsurprisingly yield thought, policy, and behavior that is notably similar.<sup>24</sup> It is not characteristically culturally very American to be modest and strongly respectful when dealing with more than marginally alien societies and cultures. In the very early 2000s, I was appalled by the excessive ambition that I detected in the constructivist mood of some American nation-builders. This

is an old, old story; some of us recall the hopes based on unsound assumptions that helped thwart the American social scientific project in South Vietnam.

**nations cannot be built by well-meaning but culturally arrogant foreign social scientists, no matter how well intentioned and methodologically sophisticated**

My argument is strictly practical and strategic; it is not normative. The issue is not whether Iraq, Afghanistan, or anywhere else either needs to be, or should be “improved.” Instead, the issue is whether or not the job is feasible. Even if it would be well worth doing, if it is mission impossible or highly improbable at sustainable cost to us, then it ought not to be attempted. This is Strategy 101. However, such a judgment does not mean, ipso facto, that a particular insurgency must be ignored by the United States. All it means is that a COIN effort strategically intended to reconstruct and deliver an (alien) society markedly different from that currently extant is bound to fail. If insurgents, terrorists, or pirates are a serious threat to international order and American national security, they must be neutralized by tactics that will produce the required effect, even if only for a while. Truly lasting solutions may well be beyond us, but since societal reconstruction is certainly not a practicable option, we have to settle for what is good enough for today and the near-term future. This is very much the Israeli attitude toward Hamas in Gaza and Hizballah in Lebanon. It is not pretty and it is certainly not definitive, but in an imperfect world that poses some wicked problems, states do what they can and must.

## Conclusion

This article has ranged ambitiously over contested conceptual terrain and has raided promiscuously, probably slaughtering and certainly endangering a few innocent bystanders along with the villains. Notwithstanding its occasionally roguishly combative tone, the argument here is one that attempts cohesion, integration, and even consensus, not further division. The dominant claim in the article is that much of the debate of recent years among rival tribes of scholarly warriors over COIN and counterinsurgency doctrine could be rendered more coherent and useful if it were conducted in the intellectual context of strategy's general theory. When COIN is placed properly in its conceptual setting as a thought and activity set necessarily housed under the big tent of the general theory of strategy, truly helpful perspective and discipline apply. Whether or not we prefer to view COIN far more as armed anthropology/social work than as war with its warfare, still it is essential to understand that it is war and also that it is ruled by the dicta of strategy.

Disputes among scholarly warriors over the desirable balance to be struck in COIN endeavors between military and extramilitary efforts are healthy and indeed essential when they pertain to specific matters with potential consequences in desired strategic effect. However, they are neither healthy nor essential when they are fueled by the assumption that COIN projects are either principally military or principally political ventures. As behavior in a war, countering an armed insurgency, COIN necessarily is about politics and is conducted ultimately for political reasons. But armed insurgents have to be defeated, and more to the point, credible evidence of their prospective, if cumulative, defeat has to be provided to fearful yet prudently skeptical local civilian bystanders. If or when COIN argument strays into what amounts to an either/or mode in considering the political and the military, it is in want of conceptual navigational correction. COIN is war and it involves some warfare, but it is conducted for political reasons. This logic is absolute. **PRISM**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 578.

<sup>2</sup> A distinction between COIN and counterinsurgency is argued forcefully in Sebastian L.v. Gorka and David Kilcullen, "An Actor-centric Theory of War: Understanding the Difference Between COIN and Counterinsurgency," *Joint Force Quarterly* 60 (1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2011), 14–18. My argument does not require me either to endorse or reject Gorka and Kilcullen's distinction between COIN and counterinsurgency, so I will not enter a debate when I need not do so. The two are deployed in this article as alternative terms for the same phenomenon. The choice of one or the other is simply a matter of style and convenience for me and is not intended to carry any implied rebuke to Gorka and Kilcullen.

<sup>3</sup> Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Preparing for One War and Getting Another* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, September 2010); Gorka and Kilcullen; and David H. Ucko, "Counterinsurgency after Afghanistan," *PRISM* 3, no. 1 (December 2011), 3–20.

<sup>4</sup> See Colin S. Gray, *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Clausewitz, 141.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>7</sup> Brian McAllister Linn, *The Echo of Battle: The Army's Way of War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1–2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>9</sup> Colin S. Gray, *Schools for Strategy: Teaching Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conflict* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, November 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Harold R. Winton, “An Imperfect Jewel: Military Theory and the Military Profession,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 34, no. 6 (December 2011), 857.

<sup>11</sup> Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, chapters 1–2.

<sup>12</sup> Colin S. Gray, *Strategy and History: Essays on Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2006), 81–87.

<sup>13</sup> Clausewitz, 75.

<sup>14</sup> Gorka and Kilcullen.

<sup>15</sup> Clausewitz, 85, 119–121.

<sup>16</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 77.

<sup>17</sup> The demand for study and understanding in width, depth, and context was articulated at its most persuasive in Michael Howard, *The Causes of Wars and other Essays* (London: Counterpoint, 1983), 215–217.

<sup>18</sup> Historical experience can be unreliable as recovered by historians, but nonetheless it is the only empirical basis for theory and practice that we have. The would-be counterinsurgent's library, at a minimum, should contain Robert B. Asprey, *War in the Shadows: The Classic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Persia to the Present* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984); Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical and Critical Study* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998); Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy*, chapters 15–16; and Heuser, *The Strategy Makers: Thoughts on War and Society from Machiavelli to Clausewitz* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010). Some of the COIN debaters of recent years have pointed correctly to the somewhat novel character of Islamist insurgency and terrorism, though in doing so they risk neglecting much of the rich history of such strife. Religious motivation combined often confusingly with tribal and other loyalties, with the high calorific addition of antiforeign sentiment, inter alia, truly has been a persisting brew making for violent discontent over millennia, not merely the 2000s. Modern technology—the cell phone and Internet—makes some difference, but not really that much for a phenomenon that is ancient in provenance.

<sup>19</sup> There is no great mystery at the level of general principles, precepts, and lessons about good practice in counterinsurgency or insurgency. The classic list is T.E. Lawrence's “Twenty-seven Articles” that was published in the *Arab Bulletin* (April 20, 1917), available at <[www.wsma.edu/dmi/IWmsgs/The 27Articles of T.E.Lawrence.pdf](http://www.wsma.edu/dmi/IWmsgs/The%2027Articles%20of%20T.E.Lawrence.pdf)>. A modern variant, from the perspective of a counterinsurgent company commander, is David Kilcullen's list of 28 Articles in his *Counterinsurgency* (London: C. Hurst, 2010), chapter 1. Since lists are favored in COIN literature, I offer my own 28 “lessons from an irregular war” in “The Anglo-Irish War, 1919–1921,” *Comparative Strategy* 26, no. 5 (October–November 2007), 388–392.

<sup>20</sup> Mao Zedong (attrib.), *On Guerrilla Warfare* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1961), 52.

<sup>21</sup> To quote Rupert Smith, who has taken out an intellectual patent on the phrase, in *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> To expand by implication, at least, on Clausewitz, 605.

<sup>23</sup> Ken Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (London: Croom, Helm, 1979), is a small book with large lasting value.

<sup>24</sup> This ambitious thesis is supported eloquently in Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes* (London: C. Hurst, 2009); and also in John France, *Perilous Glory: The Rise of Western Military Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 4–5.

# Silver Bullet or Time Suck?

## Revisiting the Role of Interagency Coordination in Complex Operations

BY ANDREA BARBARA BAUMANN

American-led interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan are drawing to an end and the political climate inside the Beltway has turned decidedly hostile toward large deployments of U.S. troops and civilians overseas. Consequently, stability operations have dropped off the radar for many analysts and commentators. The policy community that once feverishly tackled questions over how to stabilize foreign countries through the extended deployment of military and civilian capabilities under various labels (most prominently state- or nation-building and/or population-centric counterinsurgency) is shifting its gaze elsewhere. With growing hindsight, the entire endeavor is often declared as flawed from the start.<sup>1</sup> In addition to this sense of strategic failure, a drop in political attention now heightens the risk of losing hard-earned insights from these operations. This is therefore a crucial time to evaluate the institutional developments that operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have spurred.

This article takes a step back from debates over the strategic validity of stability operations in order to focus on a particular aspect related to their conduct: the coordination of civilian and military organizations within an integrated, or whole-of-government, approach. It does so in full recognition of the fact that whole-of-government terminology nowadays mostly elicits exasperated sighs from governmental officials. The Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns brought the civilian-military nexus into the spotlight within the U.S. interagency community. However, effective cooperation between the Departments of Defense and State (including the U.S. Agency for International Development

**Dr. Andrea Barbara Baumann is a Visiting Research Associate in the Center for Transatlantic Relations, the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, at The Johns Hopkins University.**

[USAID]) remains a bureaucratic struggle and a cultural challenge. Government agencies may well take the demise of large-scale operations as an excuse to retreat into their respective comfort zones. Additionally, impending budget cuts come with hard choices over reductions in capabilities and programs that are likely to affect collaborative efforts.

**the scramble for policy recommendations on how to deepen coordination has often preempted the basic question of how much is enough**

These changes in the budgetary and political climate will require forms of collaboration within the U.S. Government that differ from those witnessed in the past. Some of the processes and structures that have emerged throughout the last decade are worth conserving while others will have to be discarded or adapted in the face of changing expectations over the nature of future operations. Careful assessment is needed to make these distinctions including considering mechanisms that have been introduced in order to facilitate whole-of-government efforts in the realm of stability operations. Low appetite for stability operations in decisionmaking circles should not be used as an excuse for failure to engage with the lessons they hold for coordination within the U.S. Government. This article aims to contribute to this process by looking at experiences from the recent past and outlining options for the future.

### **In Case of Emergency, Dial Coordination?**

Comprehensive or integrated approaches have come to be considered best practice by a variety of multilateral organizations and governments

in the context of complex peace and stability operations.<sup>2</sup> These policy frameworks invariably emphasize the necessity of advancing coordination among participating organizations and agencies. Their focus has often been exclusively on the *feasibility*—rather than the *desirability*—of greater integration between defense, diplomacy, and development. The scramble for policy recommendations on how to deepen coordination has often preempted the basic question of how much is enough. The policy debate surrounding whole-of-government and related coordination initiatives could appear rather dogmatic at times. Vague concepts such as smart power have turned into veritable mantras and raised high expectations regarding the implementation of an integrated civilian-military approach to stabilization.<sup>3</sup>

These policy slogans, while attractive, have failed to convey an adequate sense of how difficult it is in practice to design effective institutional frameworks for the concerted action of military, diplomatic, and developmental organizations. The vision outlined in official statements and documents of a seamless, unified civilian-military approach stands in contrast to the experience of many practitioners, who struggle to reap its proclaimed benefits in their assignments. In a recent survey conducted among 268 officials, all of whom occupied management positions within State (including USAID) and Defense, the percentage of those who felt that “collaboration” between agencies had “a beneficial effect on overall mission success” had dropped by 21 percent within just 1 year (from 2010).<sup>4</sup> Over the same period, the percentage of those who felt that collaboration made their overall mission “less successful” had increased from 3 percent to 14 percent.<sup>5</sup>

These numbers are more usefully interpreted as indicators of growing awareness among officials of the costs associated with interagency

U.S. Soldiers with PRT Zabul cross footbridge to visit Khwazi Village, Afghanistan, to site future well project



DOD (Brian Ferguson)

cooperation rather than as a slamming verdict on its utility. The advantages of comprehensive or integrated approaches over parallel, independent action by individual agencies have been repeated countless times. Coordinated approaches are generally viewed as leading to better results in the key areas of coherence, cost-effectiveness, and complementarity.<sup>6</sup> Coherence among participating agencies is sought internally (in pursuit of unity of effort in the absence of unified command) as well as to ensure consistency toward external audiences (including local stakeholders, host nation officials, and the media). Cost-effectiveness is one of the primary motivations behind efforts to consolidate processes for resource allocation, planning, delivery, and evaluation. Complementarity, finally, is a function of the inherent complexity of stability operations. It is widely recognized that these operations require the application of a wide range of professional expertise to deal simultaneously with crosscutting and interdependent problems in the areas of security, governance, and socioeconomic development.

Beneath the general consensus that coordination is beneficial, however, there is little clarity on the precise form or intensity of “working together” that any of these objectives imply. Terms such as *coordination*, *collaboration*, *integration*, and *cooperation* are often used interchangeably in policy and scholarly papers, and this article is no exception. How can one argue, then, that coordination is either sufficient or insufficient, or that coordination efforts are succeeding or failing?<sup>7</sup> What sort of benchmarks determine whether a lack of coordination is indeed to blame for suboptimal outcomes—or that increased levels of coordination have led to concrete gains? Persistent lack of agreement over the small print of a unified whole-of-government approach is reflected in the fact that proposals for organizational reform in the area of national security have failed to gain traction over the past decade



in spite of sophisticated thinking on the subject.<sup>8</sup> Limited, process-oriented changes have been more effective, for instance, in the areas of joint planning and cross-departmental project management. Hence, in the absence of agreement on organization, agreement on process has become the alternative path toward cross-governmental cooperation.<sup>9</sup> Procedural adjustments have helped to reduce transaction costs, facilitate communication among departments, and pool expertise and resources from different corners of the government architecture. Yet in the absence of further institutionalization, many processes and practices have remained heavily dependent on the commitment and leadership of people during their stay in office.

### PRTs took on a leading role in the coordination of civilian and military efforts both in Iraq and in Afghanistan

The future demand for interagency coordination will vary from one mission to another. Sometimes it may be enough to maintain basic consultation processes among departments, but past experience has demonstrated that the demand curve can be steep if a mission or field of activity develops where close coordination is an imperative. The dynamic nature of the demand for coordination has implications for organizational structures and resources. While coordination tools can be introduced or built up on short notice (granted the availability of resources), they often require longer timeframes to produce actual results. For example, technical facilities to share information among different agencies, including compatible systems and shared protocols, neither automatically guarantee that officials at either end of the channel have a shared understanding of the

information that is transmitted, nor do they enable agencies to jointly act on the information. Institutional structures that promote the integration of effort (and understanding) among practitioners from different agency backgrounds are therefore likely to require resources that are better placed within standing agency budgets than operational contingency funds.

A key question that arises from these observations is “How does one design institutional mechanisms that provide governmental agencies the flexibility to respond to variations in the depth and form of interagency coordination between missions or issue areas?” The following section engages with this question by evaluating the performance of two organizational structures that were introduced over the past decade to coordinate civilian and military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

### Coordination Structures within the Bureaucracy and in the Field

On the ground, Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) were initially introduced in Afghanistan to facilitate outreach to a variety of stakeholders at the provincial level outside Kabul in the early days of the campaign.<sup>10</sup> Over time, they took on a leading role in the coordination of civilian and military efforts both in Iraq and in Afghanistan that is well documented in the academic and policy literature.<sup>11</sup> The coordination mechanism established within State on the basis of a Presidential directive, the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS), has not achieved quite the same notoriety but has equally become the subject of debate and analysis, including in this journal.<sup>12</sup>

***PRTs: Civil-Military Melting Pots with an Expiry Date.*** The use of PRTs as joint platforms for civilian and military agencies in the

theater of operations undoubtedly provided a number of advantages. Shared structures allowed for the pooling of funding streams from different budgets. The combination of small, rapidly available funds with larger sums (often governed by more complex regulations) offered practitioners on the ground a flexible solution to bridge the gap between immediate needs and long-term projects.<sup>13</sup> Civilian agencies benefited from the transport and security arrangements provided by the military through the PRT structure and from improved access to military decisionmaking and planning at the tactical level. By acting as focal points for shared logistics and joint project management, PRTs thus offered tangible benefits for interagency coordination.

Against the backdrop of frequent rotations and changes in staff, the shared physical space provided by the PRTs helped mold a variety of professional profiles and backgrounds into a common approach at the tactical level. However, close proximity in the absence of uniform regulations and standards (for example, for accommodation, dispute resolution, leave, and security) could equally provoke resentment and deepen prejudices and stereotypes among personnel from different agency backgrounds. Moreover, the dynamics that led to increased cooperation on the ground are not necessarily a function of the PRT structure alone. Coordination between different agency representatives was arguably facilitated by a common desire among practitioners to contribute to tangible, immediate improvements of local conditions. Shared disdain for petty bureaucracy within their home institutions and the desire to escape micromanagement and to get on with the job could create a sense of commonality that bridged cultural gaps between civilian and military professionals.<sup>14</sup> These features raise doubts over the possibility of replicating the sense of

common purpose that emerged alongside the PRT model in a different context, where objectives are less immediate and less localized.

Moreover, PRTs provided only limited support to stabilization professionals—whether from a military or civilian background—in the development and professionalization of their expertise beyond the limited duration of a tour or assignment. While they generated numerous lessons on how to combine security, governance, and development programs at the provincial and district levels, the personality-dependent and temporary character of arrangements within most PRTs meant they were ill-suited to consolidate and institutionalize best practice. Personalities were widely perceived to determine the quality of interagency relationships within the PRTs irrespective of formal hierarchies or structures. As a civilian expert returning from a deployment in Afghanistan noted, if “civ-mil” was simply formalized as “yet another box to tick” on the military’s checklists, it hardly led to genuine collaboration.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, PRTs were conditioned—and limited in their coordinating role—by the massive military presence that characterized stability operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The PRT model was geared toward mitigating the logic of numbers that shaped civilian-military relationships on the ground, but ultimately proved unable to alter it.<sup>16</sup> As a development expert noted, “Two [USAID] people in a PRT are going where the military wants them to go. . . . If you send thousands of troops you cannot expect a civilian solution. Once you are there you conceded the strategy.”<sup>17</sup> In this context, the PRTs primarily added value by serving as vehicles for the projection of a mix of civilian and military expertise and the resources required for its delivery at the province and district levels. However, they ultimately

contributed little to the coherent development of stabilization expertise and offered only limited institutional support for professionals who came to accumulate and embody this expertise. In the absence of complementary efforts at the home institutional level, the contribution of the PRT model to the coordination of civilian and military efforts is likely to remain both process-oriented and localized.

far from a technocratic tool, S/CRS was itself a bureaucratic creature faced with securing resources and finding a voice in the marketplace of ideas and influence

**S/CRS: Mandate Impossible?** The Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization was established within the State Department in July 2004. National Security Presidential Directive 44 formally authorized the Secretary of State to task the coordinator with a range of functions and called on other executive departments and agencies to collaborate.<sup>18</sup> “It seemed like you had this wonderful, clear authority for the whole operation,” recalled a senior State Department official, “but in the real world, these declarations had only limited impact.”<sup>19</sup> Far from a technocratic tool, S/CRS was itself a bureaucratic creature faced with the imperative of securing resources and finding a voice in the marketplace of ideas and influence within government. Bureaucratic politics—rather than operational requirements or strategic considerations—threatened to shape its mandate. While the military welcomed the opportunity to liaise with the civilian side of government through a single point of contact, established constituencies within State and USAID saw the new unit as a potential rival that would either draw scarce resources away

or waste them by duplicating existing capacity. In this context, the rhetoric employed by the initial leadership, which envisaged an ambitious coordinating role for the unit, was described by a former S/CRS official as “powerfully crippling—it made nobody want to work with us.”<sup>20</sup>

The shift toward a more modest and selective agenda, adopted after 2006 under Ambassador John Herbst, provided a more realistic baseline for the fledgling unit to engage in a fight for institutional recognition and survival. One strategy to mitigate the crippling effect that the skepticism and hostility of established players within the bureaucracy had on its development was for S/CRS to profile itself as a convener and facilitator instead of pushing for an authoritative role. The office would add value by assisting other elements of the government in synchronizing different policies within a unified package rather than seeking to impose a vision of its own. Yet the strategy of conquering and defending institutional space within the bureaucracy by responding to external requests for assistance threatened to curtail the office’s ownership and control over the development of a coherent mandate. In trying to satisfy a variety of demands placed on it, the new office risked satisfying none in the end. As a former official contended, “It would have been better to pick a model and say ‘this is who we are.’”<sup>21</sup>

In a similar vein, the focus on developing deployable capability turned out to be a poisoned chalice. It bought S/CRS goodwill within the foreign affairs establishment, which hardly objected to the creation of additional capacity to fill hardship posts overseas, but at the same time risked turning the office into a mere “body shop” for other agencies. Where its customers primarily saw additional human resources and equipment, S/CRS was keen to use the deployment of experts to project specialist expertise to embassies and field headquarters. This included,



PRT officials visit construction site of new prison in Basra, Iraq, to ensure logistical and quality standards are met

DOD (Christopher Wellner)

for instance, planning tools that were neither widely used nor readily accepted within the rest of the State Department. As a senior official explained, “If all we do is create more people who can move faster, *without the other functions*, we will be increasingly less ‘ad hoc’—but that’s about it.”<sup>22</sup>

S/CRS nevertheless managed to offer a number of advantages in terms of interagency coordination within the U.S. Government. First, the office shouldered a number of transaction costs that arose from the demand for close civilian-military cooperation in Iraq and Afghanistan. It deployed experts overseas to facilitate joint civilian-military planning on the ground and developed recruitment criteria and training curricula for the establishment of a Civilian Response Corps. However, many of these functions are arguably closer to the mandate of developing specialist expertise in order to fill skill gaps within the government than elements of a proper *coordinating* role. Second, S/CRS can be said to have provided a home to a hybrid, civilian-military professional community that emerged in the area of stabilization and reconstruction. Consistent with the brevity of its existence and its specialist focus, S/CRS promoted attachment to the “cause” or mission rather than to career ladders or deep-seated agency traditions.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, it did not have the institutional clout to support these professionals in the development of their expertise and careers. Those who chose to stay with the unit often acted out of personal dedication and interest in the mission pursued by S/CRS, sometimes at the risk of jeopardizing career prospects within their home institutions.

In sum, the S/CRS mandate often resembled a delicate balancing act: it was expected to coordinate without assuming authority, facilitate joint planning and implementation with few resources of its own, and generate expertise without interfering with the business of State’s powerful regional bureaus.

Its experience illustrates a dilemma related to the institutionalization of coordination functions in the form of a separate unit or organization. If the unit's mandate implies challenging entrenched practices and promoting new and possibly uncomfortable ways of doing business within the bureaucracy, then it has to retain a somewhat renegade character. Leslie Schear and James Curtin have argued, for instance, that S/CRS was “cast in the role of a ‘constructive irritant’ acting to promote new patterns of collaboration and change.”<sup>24</sup> The

**consolidation and greater resources risk weakening some of the original S/CRS advantages by adding layers of bureaucracy**

likely price for this is that the office remains at the margins of the institutional playing field and that its mandate becomes diluted by the struggle for survival. Even if supported by a formal mandate, the office would be compelled to compete for recognition within the bureaucracy for the better part of its existence if it is not adequately resourced from the start—much to the detriment of its original functions. Consolidation and greater resources, on the other hand, risk weakening some of the original S/CRS advantages (its agility and perhaps also its appetite for pushing against entrenched traditions) by adding layers of bureaucracy. In that regard, the transformation of the office into a functional bureau within the State Department provides an opportunity to enhance its independence and authority over the strategic development of civilian crisis and conflict management doctrine and capability. There is a risk, however, that the new bureau will turn its back on the uncomfortable task of fostering interagency consensus and become more insular and one-dimensional in its approach.

## **Interagency Coordination 2.0: What Toolkit after Iraq and Afghanistan?**

What lessons can be drawn from past experience to design smart coordination tools for the future? The two types of institutional mechanisms evaluated above—both of which emerged over the past decade in response to calls for the integration of defense, diplomacy, and development—have certain features in common. First, they turned out to be relatively resource-intensive means to foster coordination in terms of funding and manpower (which also meant that they were underfunded most of the time). Second, their form and outlook were shaped by the reality of large-scale U.S. military deployments overseas and the demand for more civilians in these theaters of operation. Finally, they had a strong operational focus that arguably came at the detriment of other considerations related to their existence, like, for example, implications of their institutionalization in the mid to long term, as well as conceptual and doctrinal developments. These examples illustrate the limitations of a whole-of-government approach that relies on agreed procedure in the absence of agreed organization. The following recommendations address alternative ways of dealing with this dilemma by examining institutional capacity and then considering conceptual underpinnings. Together, they advocate for a more selective approach to coordination.

### **Tackling the Institutional Dilemma**

Past proposals for a single integrated national security department and other calls for large-scale bureaucratic reorganization have been stymied by political and resource-related constraints.<sup>25</sup> Yet rather than having budget trends dictate the form and depth of coordination, interagency reform should follow from a

careful assessment of its desirability in light of past experience and on the basis of educated guesses about future demand. Selective investments and changes at the margins may stand a better chance of providing a sustainable basis for effective coordination than the (largely elusive) quest for a unified bureaucratic structure.

The aim of a selective approach to coordination is to turn governmental agencies into smart customers of other agencies' services and expertise—not to streamline and standardize the different approaches that they bring to the table within a single unified outfit. Institutionally, this entails a shift from integrated organizational structures at home and in the field toward flexible, networked forms of interaction. In contrast to the mechanisms discussed above, the tools of a selective approach would operate as shared platforms among existing organizations instead of proliferating into new offices and units. Over the past few years, innovative ways of information-sharing among different organizations have emerged in the form of virtual networks and communities of practice dedicated to identifying best practice and learning lessons.<sup>26</sup> These structures should be expanded to encourage a frank exchange among agencies, and, more importantly, they should be empowered to address and manage conflicts of interest that inevitably arise in the process. Acting as clearinghouses rather than as “coordinators,” they would leave the development of core expertise, doctrine/policy, and training curricula to standing departments and agencies instead of pushing for integration in these areas.

A selective approach to coordination, moreover, relies on the ability of agency officials to move and work effectively—and with authority—between standing departments and agencies. Rather than entrusting separate units with the task of transforming the working habits and cultures of organizations, the

government should revitalize existing proposals for interagency reform, which aim at softening the seams between organizations in order to make them more permeable for interagency-savvy staff. These require renewed debate on the optimal size and staff profile of a select cadre of so-called national security professionals, as well as on legislation to attract outstanding individuals and provide them with viable career paths.<sup>27</sup> While joint training modules for practitioners have attracted considerable attention over recent years, their ability to attract both funding and highly skilled individuals in the absence of concrete operational demands is uncertain. In this regard, it is more important to socialize governmental agencies into supporting interagency-focused staff to work flexibly on crosscutting issues than to train “interagency specialists” in a given domain. Hence, a reputable selection process for national security professionals that is regarded as such throughout the government bureaucracy is a more sustainable investment than the proliferation of specialized training modules. The latter may be added at relatively short notice and tailored to operational requirements as they arise—but only if a sufficient institutional basis for cross-government working exists in the first place.

The cadre would differ from early S/CRS aspirations for a coordinating role as well as from its subsequent focus on rotating subject matter experts in and out of hardship assignments. Its main focus would be to ensure continuity in interagency consultations and provide a basis for expansion in times of increased demand for joint action. In other words, it would exert a steady “pulse function” within the bureaucracy through a network of officials who nevertheless remain part of the normal fabric of their parent organizations. Such crosscutting functional concerns as gender equality and human rights have



become increasingly mainstreamed throughout the U.S. policymaking apparatus but still require a dedicated constituency that continues to remind departments of their commitments to these issues and advocates for their inclusion into policy instruments.<sup>28</sup> The same applies to interagency or, more specifically, civilian-military coordination. Nearly a generation of governmental officials who have spent their formative years dealing with the

**a truly comprehensive approach implies the cultivation of a certain degree of constructive friction among agencies**

complex challenges of Iraq and Afghanistan now instinctively adopts an inclusive perspective and considers coordination a fact of life rather than a chore. This legacy is at risk, however, if these officials do not see their behavior rewarded and supported by their home institutions through smart and sustainable incentive structures.

### **Reframing the Conceptual Basis**

In addition to institutional arrangements, concepts and ideas that have shaped expectations about “the interagency” in the past should be reconsidered. Based on experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, interagency cooperation has become epitomized for many by the model of “four guys in a Humvee”—a military officer, State official, one from USAID, and perhaps an intelligence analyst. At the same time, there is a sense among practitioners that this is unlikely to be the standard for future operations. Concerns over the perceived legitimacy of foreign interventions have encouraged the combination of civilian and military elements of power and the participation of a wide and diverse range of actors (civilian, military, governmental, and nongovernmental) in the past,

and will again. It is reasonable to assume that future operations will involve multiple actors who bring along intermittent disharmony, recurring conflicts of interest, and near-permanent friction. A truly comprehensive approach therefore implies the cultivation of a certain degree of constructive friction among agencies. Different organizations are called upon to unite behind a common mission precisely because their staffs bring *distinct* skills and expertise to the table. A combination of different professional perspectives—rather than a single lens—is deemed necessary to understand and respond to complex security challenges in contemporary interventions. Unity and harmony can neither be the precondition for nor the automatic outcome of a comprehensive civilian-military or “smart power” approach. While often perceived as an indicator of failure, confrontation and friction among organizations may well be signs that a genuinely *comprehensive* approach is at work. Consequently, they deserve greater attention.

Many of the policy debates on complex operations have revolved around the notions of sequencing (of different actions or lines of operation) and transitioning (between different actors). While these are inevitable byproducts of a multiagency operation, they should be accompanied by a more explicit and central recognition of *tradeoffs* that individual agencies are confronted with in the process. The tendency to call for joint processes by default should give way to more careful analysis of *when* and *where* integrated structures are indeed superior to (and more cost-effective than) agency-led processes. The main advantages to be gained from integration are a sense of shared ownership and greater levels of buy-in from participating agencies. The resulting products or processes, however, may lose some of their utility for individual agencies. Tradeoffs are most readily identified



when they have a direct impact on resources. For instance, the integration of planning and reporting systems requires civilian agencies to dispatch (reasonably senior) personnel to sub-national headquarters and command centers in order to match the military command structure. This confronts short-staffed civilian agencies with difficult decisions over how to best allocate scarce human resources. Less evident but possibly more significant tradeoffs have arisen in the past from differences in organizational cultures that relate to modes of decisionmaking, human resources, and knowledge management. Illustrations of these types of tradeoffs are found in the areas of joint doctrine and training, which have been key components of a whole-of-government approach to stability operations.

In the realm of doctrine, past efforts to draft an interagency “counterinsurgency [COIN] guide” under the auspices of the State Department turned into a lengthy process, which ultimately produced an abstract document that received little attention or buy-in within the wider bureaucracy. In an earlier issue of this journal, Raphael Cohen argues that “The very fact that the [COIN] guide was an interagency product may have decreased its value” and that the guide reflected “a brokered consensus rather than a singularly distinct point of view.”<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, Cohen suggests that military doctrine may be of greatest use to the interagency community when serving as “a window into understanding the military as the dominant institution [in a COIN setting].”<sup>30</sup> While inclusive in its consultative phase, the doctrinal process that led to the military’s widely acclaimed counterinsurgency field manual (FM 3-24) remained under the authority of a small team of authors with strong organizational leadership and control.<sup>31</sup> The State Department’s inaugural Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development

Review, in December 2010, which promoted an explicitly *civilian* perspective on conflict and crisis response, was a similarly inclusive but agency-driven process, which ultimately received greater recognition within government (and beyond) than the previous interagency-focused initiative. In sum, interagency buy-in does not exclusively or automatically follow interagency authorship; and coherent agency-specific products may ultimately capture a wider audience than interagency doctrine reduced to the lowest common denominator.

**the past decade has shown that extensive training modules, as traditionally employed by military organizations, are not easily transferred to a whole-of-government context**

The experience of the past decade has further shown that extensive training modules, as traditionally employed by military organizations, are not easily transferred to a whole-of-government context. This is partly due to the discrepancy in staff numbers between military and civilian agencies, which makes it difficult for civilian officials to leave their desks unattended to participate in joint exercises. Yet given the different nature of their expertise and interactions with stakeholders, diplomats and development experts also do not attribute the same value to large-scale standardized and repetitive exercising within their own organizations. For the military, teambuilding, leadership development, and the consolidation of skills and routines go largely hand in hand. Civilian stabilization experts who participate in joint exercises, however, may derive certain teambuilding benefits (if training schedules are synchronized with deployments) but not

necessarily any of the other benefits mentioned. Interagency training is thus not just a matter of how many people an agency can send to a joint exercise. It requires careful consideration of differences in approach to the development of human resources and the cultivation of expertise within each partner organization.

While these examples require further discussion, they point to the conclusion that “joint” is not a quality seal per se. If joint programs and structures are not based on an explicit discussion of tradeoffs, they risk consuming considerable resources while producing little more than a shallow “feel good” effect in the interagency community.

### Conclusion

The drawdown of American military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan has led to a reduction in the immediate demand for operational civilian-military coordination within the U.S. Government. The precise form that future operations will take is hard to predict. That they are likely to straddle the 20<sup>th</sup>-century boundaries between defense, diplomacy, and development is certain. The resulting challenge is to design a flexible institutional framework that allows agencies to cooperate effectively *if* and *where* needed, while at the same time allowing them to prioritize scarce resources in accordance with distinctly different core mandates and working methods.

This article has outlined the shortcomings of a whole-of-government approach that relies on agreed procedure in the absence of agreed organization. It has provided an assessment of the contribution to interagency coordination in stability operations made by two recent coordination mechanisms—Provincial Reconstruction Teams and the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization. Two sets of recommendations have argued for a more

selective approach to coordination, which allows for adaptation to variations in the demand for civilian-military coordination. Institutionally, this approach leads away from the integration of operational capability toward ensuring that the 3Ds are sufficiently connected to allow for coordination to be intensified when (and where) needed. Conceptually, these recommendations shift the focus away from an implicit quest for harmony toward more explicit recognition of the inevitability—and inherent desirability—of continued friction among agencies within a comprehensive approach. Correspondingly, they emphasize the need to part with the assumption that joint processes are inevitably superior to agency-led processes.

The desire to identify, capture, and institutionalize lessons from past and ongoing operations is a constant feature of policymaking. Yet none of the insights accumulated by organizations or individual practitioners over the years is an objective lesson that simply waits to be detected and distilled into best practice. The lessons our institutions ultimately retain depend on the assumptions that guide our analysis of what has happened. It is therefore crucial to examine the legacy of the past decade with a critical and open mind that is willing to question the conventional wisdom, however widespread. In that regard, it is not bad news that the focus on the operational integration of civilian and military efforts that has characterized stability operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is now giving way to other concerns. This opens space for considerations that have not yet received sufficient attention. These include the need to cooperate more effectively with international organizations and other governments, the importance of taking local interlocutors seriously and building effective partnerships, and a shift in expertise from postconflict

reconstruction to conflict prevention. The past decade has clearly shown that interagency coordination comes at a price. Yet the investment may pay off if it helps agencies to become smart customers of each other's strengths and tolerant toward each other's requirements to do things *differently*. The answer lies—as usual—somewhere in the middle. **PRISM**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Arguing against this widespread view is, for instance, Paul D. Miller, “The Case for Nation-building: Why and How to Fix Failed States,” *PRISM* 3, no. 1 (December 2011), 63–74.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of national approaches, see Stewart Patrick and Kaysie Brown, *Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts? Assessing “Whole of Government” Approaches to Fragile States* (New York: International Peace Academy, 2007). On the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), see Philipp Rotmann, *Built on Shaky Ground: The Comprehensive Approach in Practice*, Research Paper 63 (Rome, Italy: NATO Defense College, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> See Hillary Clinton, Nomination Hearing for the Post of Secretary of State before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC, January 13, 2009; The White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, May 2010); Department of State, *Leading Through Civilian Power: The First Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review* (Washington, DC: Department of State, December 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Government Business Council (GBC), *Joining Forces: Interagency Collaboration and “Smart Power,” A Candid Survey of Federal Employees*, GBC Insight Report underwritten by Booz Allen Hamilton (Washington, DC: GBC, December 2011), 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Similar terminology is found in the “3C approach in situations of conflict and fragility,” which has been promoted by a number of European nations in association with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee, NATO, World Bank, and United Nations, available at <[www.3c-conference2009.ch](http://www.3c-conference2009.ch)>.

<sup>7</sup> Ted Strickler proposes the use of a matrix to measure the quality of interagency coordination in “Interagency Cooperation: Quo Vadis?” *InterAgency Journal* 1, no. 1 (2010), 6.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Project on National Security Reform (PNSR), *Forging a New Shield* (Washington, DC: PNSR, 2008), available at <[http://pnsr.org/data/files/pnsr\\_forging\\_a\\_new\\_shield\\_report.pdf](http://pnsr.org/data/files/pnsr_forging_a_new_shield_report.pdf)>.

<sup>9</sup> I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of this article who suggested framing the issue in these terms.

<sup>10</sup> See Center for Humanitarian Cooperation, *Civil-military Cooperation Conference: Summary Report and Findings* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, January 16, 2003), 4.

<sup>11</sup> For an overview, see Christoff Luehrs, “Provincial Reconstruction Teams: A Literature Review,” *PRISM* 1, no. 1 (December 2009), 95–102.

<sup>12</sup> See John E. Herbst, “Addressing the Problem of Failed States: A New Instrument,” *PRISM* 1, no. 1 (December 2009), 21–26; Hans Binnendijk and Patrick M. Cronin, eds., *Civilian Surge: Key to Complex Operations* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2009), 98–109; Dane F. Smith, Jr., *U.S. Peacefare: Organizing American Peace-building Operations* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2010), 39–41; Renanah Miles, “The State Department, USAID, and the Flawed Mandate for Stabilization and Reconstruction,” *PRISM* 3, no. 1 (December 2011), 37–47.

<sup>13</sup> For a breakdown of different sources of funding within U.S.-led Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), see U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight and

Investigations, *Agency Stovepipes vs Strategic Agility: Lessons We Need to Learn from Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq and Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, April 2008), 23. See also Robert Perito, *The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Lessons Identified*, Special Report 152 (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, October 2005), 10.

<sup>14</sup> On this gap, see, for instance, Shawn Dorman, “Iraq PRTs: Pins on a Map,” *Foreign Service Journal* 84, no. 3 (2007), 33; Perito, 5.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. civil servant, interview with author, November 24, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> See also Henry Nuzum, *Shades of CORDS in the Kush: The False Hope of “Unity of Effort” in American Counterinsurgency* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2010), 33.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Agency for International Development officer, interview with author, October 28, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> National Security Presidential Directive 44, “Management of Interagency Efforts Concerning Reconstruction and Stabilization,” The White House, December 7, 2005. This directive superseded Presidential Decision Directive 56, “Managing Complex Contingency Operations,” The White House, May 20, 1997.

<sup>19</sup> Senior Foreign Service Officer, interview with author, October 21, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) official, interview with author, December 10, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Senior Foreign Service Officer, interview, emphasis added.

<sup>23</sup> S/CRS official, interview.

<sup>24</sup> James A. Schear and Leslie B. Curtin, “Complex Operations: Recalibrating the State Department’s Role,” in *Civilian Surge: Key to Complex Operations*, ed. Hans Binnendijk and Patrick M. Cronin, 104 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, Clark A. Murdock, Michèle Flournoy, and Mac Bollman, *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: U.S. Government and Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era, Phase 2 Report* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> For example, the Center for Complex Operations, authorized by Congress in the fiscal year 2009 National Defense Authorization Act. The International Stabilization and Peacebuilding Initiative follows a similar model but with broader international membership. See Civilian Capacity for Peace Operations, available at <[www.civcap.info](http://www.civcap.info)>.

<sup>27</sup> For an overview of existing initiatives, see Catherine Dale, *National Security Professionals and Interagency Reform: Proposals, Recent Experience, and Issues for Congress*, RL34565 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, September 26, 2011). See also PNSR, *The Power of People: Building an Integrated National Security Professional System for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Washington, DC: PNSR, November 2010), available at <[www.pnsr.org/data/images/pnsr\\_the\\_power\\_of\\_people\\_report.pdf](http://www.pnsr.org/data/images/pnsr_the_power_of_people_report.pdf)>.

<sup>28</sup> The author is grateful to Cecily Brewer, Department of State, for these examples.

<sup>29</sup> Raphael S. Cohen, “A Tale of Two Manuals,” *PRISM* 2, no. 1 (December 2010), 96.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, December 15, 2006).

# Finding Innovation in State-building

## Moving Beyond the Orthodox Liberal Model

BY MARK SEDRA

The collapse of a series of postcolonial states in the developing world following the end of the Cold War stimulated a shift in Western security thinking. Influenced by the emerging discourse on globalization, Western policymakers and analysts began to see these newly bankrupt states in the global periphery as posing a distinct threat to the wealthy Western core of the international system. Indeed, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which were partially planned from one of the world's chronic fragile states, Afghanistan, seemed to justify the notion that ungoverned spaces around the world posed a direct threat to global security.

The George W. Bush administration seized on this notion in its 2002 National Security Strategy stating that “America is now threatened less by conquering states than . . . by failing ones. . . . Weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states.”<sup>1</sup> This policy direction was reinforced by the Obama administration, which, in its 2010 National Security Strategy, called for a renewal of U.S. leadership in “secur[ing] fragile states like Afghanistan and Haiti.”<sup>2</sup> The United States was not alone in its concern over the potential that failed states could sow discord far beyond their borders. Numerous other Western states and international agencies developed tailored strategies, bureaucratic units, and policy approaches to address the problem at its source through the construction of effective democratic states.

State-building came to be seen as the principal mechanism to address the perceived threat of failed and fragile states. Bush's National Security Strategy stated that the best way to confront the danger of failed and fragile states was to encourage “free and open societies on every continent.”<sup>3</sup>

Mark Sedra is an Adjunct Lecturer at the University of Waterloo and a Faculty Member at the Balsillie School of International Affairs in Waterloo, Canada.



U.S. Navy (Laura A. Moore)

Two weeks after Haiti's 2010 earthquake, Soldiers in Cité Soleil carry out humanitarian mission

Historian John Lewis Gaddis saw this commitment to liberal state-building as a valiant attempt to “finish the job Woodrow Wilson started” and believed that it represented “the most important reformulation of U.S. grand strategy in over half a century.”<sup>4</sup> It inaugurated what some have referred to as the “nation-building as the best defense” school.<sup>5</sup>

Even though the extent of the proliferation of threats emanating from fragile and failing states (the contagion effect, so to speak) is increasingly being challenged in academic literature, there remains a wide consensus in the Western policy community that assisting troubled states and integrating them into the international security framework will deliver direct security benefits. The problem, however, is that the capacity of today's Western state-builders to nurture healthy and sustainable states in ungoverned or weakly governed spaces has been surprisingly limited, despite several decades of experience, beginning with the formative cases of postwar Germany and Japan. While those early test cases were successful, most of their lessons are not applicable given that today's failed states lack the wealth, bureaucratic know-how, human capital, and democratic traditions (even if limited) that favored success in postwar Germany and Japan.<sup>6</sup>

The reasons behind the poor record of today's state-builders are hardly a mystery. Common trends can be identified in the post-mortems of several recent state-building experiments, from insufficient donor resource commitments to the internal contradictions of the liberal state-building paradigm itself. A part of the prevailing mythology of state-building is that it is largely an apolitical, nonideological, and technocratic enterprise. In reality, it is a deeply politicized and ideologically driven project, as much shaped by the interests of its donors as by the on-the-ground power dynamics of the recipient country. This lack of honesty, or perhaps this hubris, of today's liberal state-builders has marred the project's implementation.



To adequately critique current state-building policy and practice and suggest new approaches, this article analyzes the evolution of exogenous state-building and deconstructs the different forms it has taken. Four specific models are identified and discussed: pre-liberal (or “Darwinian”), containment, liberal, and post-liberal. Each model has been shaped partly by conditions in the international system at different junctures in history and features elements that hold some utility today. This article does not argue for the wholesale discarding of the current liberal state-building model but rather the introduction of a mediated or moderated form that allows for more variation in how states are conceived and nurtured in different contexts. In other words, it proposes a model that endorses fundamental liberal principles such as democracy, accountability, transparency, and respect for human rights but understands that there may be different routes to achieve them in a particular context based on its unique culture, history, and norms. It means actualizing the core principle of ownership and acculturating the model to reflect the local context, mantras often repeated but rarely observed with any zeal or sincerity by today’s state-builders.

### Understanding Contemporary State-building

The end of the Cold War led to a fundamental reshaping of the international security architecture and to the emergence of new strategic imperatives for the West. This re-prioritization placed new emphasis on state failure and its consequences, including civil conflicts, religious and ethnic extremism, mass population displacements, economic inequality, and environmental degradation. The prevailing view was that since the security of the international system is dependent on “a state’s capacity

to govern its own territory,” the existence of pockets of instability “not only threatens the lives and livelihoods of their own peoples but endangers world peace.”<sup>7</sup>

As state failure is typically an affliction of small and developing states, “the question of security,” in the words of Mark Duffield, “has almost gone full circle: from being concerned with the biggest economies and war machines in the world to an interest in some of the smallest.”<sup>8</sup> Duffield outlines how the process of globalization has internationalized the instability of the South.<sup>9</sup> One interpretation of the contemporary international system is that it has been divided into two zones, a zone of peace—or the liberal capitalist “core”—and a zone of conflict—or the unstable “periphery.” Referred to as the “center-periphery model,”

**the allusion of “barbarians at the gates,” one with many historical precedents, has often been used to describe the present security environment**

this school of thought affirms that it is the globalized instability of the periphery that poses the most salient threat to the liberal capitalist core. Ronnie Lipschutz describes the rationale behind this new vision: “So long as instability can be contained within the periphery, the center will remain peaceful and secure. Some countries may be brought into the zone of peace; others may find themselves pushed outside, relegated to looking in. The boundaries within will fade away, but the boundary between center and periphery will remain clear.”<sup>10</sup>

During his 1992 Presidential election campaign, George H.W. Bush, reflecting the increasing adherence to this worldview, declared that “the enemy is unpredictability. The enemy is



instability.”<sup>11</sup> It is this belief in what Condoleezza Rice would later call an “existential threat” to the Western powers that generated renewed enthusiasm for efforts to reorder the world in the image of the West.<sup>12</sup> The allusion of “barbarians at the gates,” one with many historical precedents, has often been used to describe the present security environment.<sup>13</sup> As Michael Ignatieff states, “The problem that 9/11 [laid] bare for American power is that terror and technology have collapsed the saving distances that kept America safe from harm.”<sup>14</sup>

**while the extent of the impact of failed states may be overstated, to say they have no reach beyond their own borders and regions is inaccurate**

Minxin Pei, in a study conducted by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, found that of 16 state-building projects undertaken by the United States since its founding, only 4 can be characterized as successes (Japan, Germany, Panama in 1989, and Grenada in 1983) as judged on the basis of their ability to establish “durable democratic regimes after the withdrawal of U.S. forces.”<sup>15</sup> The humble U.S. record in state-building has prompted scholars such as Amitai Etzioni and Marina Ottaway to call for a “restrained approach” to the project.<sup>16</sup> They deride the ambitious state-building programs launched by the West over the past decade and caution that a “one-size-fits-all approach” is not suitable.<sup>17</sup> In calling for a limited approach to state-building, Etzioni and Ottaway attempt to resurrect the Cold War model, which endeavored to “construct a government that may or may not be democratic, but is preferably stable.”<sup>18</sup> The priority of state-building, according to Etzioni, should

not be to establish democratic institutions but “pacification and security, the cessation of support to groups such as al Qaeda, and of course prevention of the production and acquisition of weapons of mass destruction.”<sup>19</sup>

As Stewart Patrick states, “The brutal truth is that the vast majority of weak, failing and failed states pose risks primarily to their own inhabitants.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, many of the world’s most dysfunctional states have festered for decades with little perceptible impact on, and concern from, the international system (at least at its wealthy core). However, while the extent of the impact of failed states may be overstated, particularly when it comes to issues such as health and certain forms of organized crime (such as money-laundering, intellectual property, and environmental crime), to say they have no reach beyond their own borders and regions is inaccurate. Analysts and policymakers should be more discerning in their description of the specific types of threats posed by weak and failing states because a case can be made for the propensity of failed states to serve as incubators and facilitators of terrorism, drug-trafficking, illegal arms flows, and refugee crises. It may be difficult to draw a direct causal link between instability in the global periphery and adverse impacts in the core, but that does not mean they do not exist. There is, for instance, no shortage of examples of fragile states acting as staging grounds for terrorist attacks. A generation of Islamist militants passed through Afghanistan before launching attacks on New York, Madrid, Bali, and London, while countries such as Somalia and Yemen have been linked to more recent jihadi plots. Moreover, fragile and failed states such as Colombia, Afghanistan, and Guinea-Bissau have helped to drive global narcotics- and weapons-trafficking.

The world's weaker states indeed have greater reach and relevance today than ever before. What were once the world's strategic slums—due to factors such as endemic poverty, diminutive size, and peripheral geographic location—have now become, by virtue of their remoteness and absence of state authority, potential outposts of instability capable of projecting threats across the international system. As Patrick acknowledges, the bulk of those adverse security impacts are confined to the surrounding region of the problem territory, with much less impact on the wealthy industrialized countries than often assumed, but that does not reduce their global impact. Unhealthy regions after all will eventually impact their neighbors, with the domino effect eventually reaching the core.

### Different Blueprints for State-building

Fragile and failing states can pose a challenge to the international system, whether it is moral, security, economic, or environmental in character. Even if the extent of this challenge is questioned, and even if the state-building agenda is designed in great part to ensure the conformity of the state system—particularly its “anarchic” outposts—to some form of liberal order, the record of the international community in rebuilding troubled states has been characterized by limited successes and outright failures. Part of the problem is the nature of contemporary liberal internationalism, which does not lend itself to long-term foreign engagements. As Ignatieff states, “No imperialists have ever been so impatient for quick results.”<sup>21</sup> If we consider that “since 1989, the average time to the first post-civil war election has dropped from 5.6 years to 2.7 years,” this increasingly rushed approach becomes

all the more apparent.<sup>22</sup> The problem is more than just short-termism, though, as the liberal model itself seems fundamentally ill-equipped to replicate the European rise of the nation-state in the developing world, as famously detailed by Charles Tilly.<sup>23</sup> To test this contention, this article explores different historical and contemporary models of state-building, analyzing their advantages and disadvantages.

the record of the international community in rebuilding troubled states has been characterized by limited successes and outright failures

#### *The Pre-liberal (or “Darwinian”) Model.*

Prior to the emergence of the modern liberal state, state construction and deconstruction exhibited Darwinian characteristics; only the strongest or fittest states survived in the global system of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The prevailing environment was anarchic, more akin to Thomas Hobbes's state of nature than today's ordered system of states. In this period of great power conflict, the shape, integrity, and composition of empires and states constantly shifted, with weak, dysfunctional states routinely swallowed up into larger ones.

Two of the great powers of this period, the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, were as much devoured by their internal weaknesses as by the trauma of losing World War I. In the global periphery—the colonial world—contradictory forces were at play. On the one hand, the great European powers endeavored to develop colonial polities that served their geopolitical interests, establishing institutions and patronizing specific political elites. This resembles contemporary state-building practices to a certain degree with one notable exception:

the imperial powers were in it for the long haul. However, the colonial states were still vulnerable to the vagaries of great power politics, conflict, and competition. Borders shifted, domestic elite pacts collapsed, and empires disintegrated. For instance, following the German defeat in World War I, Germany's African colonies were parceled up and divided among the Allies or given League of Nations mandate status. When indigenous political structures could no longer deliver for the empire, whether it was a predictable supply of material resources or the pacification of native populations, they could be discarded and built anew. The same Darwinian logic applied to both the center and periphery of the global system during the colonial period.

**sovereignty is hardly universal or monolithic; its quality varies depending on locale**

The creation of the United Nations and the liberal order in the post–World War II period, enshrining the idea of sovereignty as the core building block and ordering principle of the international system, would serve as a major deterrent to large states annexing or dissolving smaller ones. However, it also served to impede the natural growth or evolution of the state system in which states and borders—mirroring changes in demographics, economics, politics, and environmental factors—naturally shift over time. In today's international system, borders are not allowed to shift and states are not allowed to fail.<sup>24</sup> State boundaries tend to be treated as fixed physical realities—natural features of the land that neatly demarcate cultures, nationalities, politics, and civilizations—rather than the imprecise, abstract, and artificial political constructs they are. The rigidity of the

international system is born of the unwillingness of today's great powers to challenge the core principle of sovereignty, believing that any such challenge could unravel the system that has prevented the type of great power conflict that led to the global wars and the destructive great power competition of earlier centuries.

The reticence to let states fail so as not to undercut the sovereign state order has paradoxically subjected the sovereignty principle to increasing scrutiny and contestation, with new schools of thought emerging on how to reframe, divide, share, or even circumvent sovereignty.<sup>25</sup> Sovereignty is hardly universal or monolithic; its quality varies depending on locale, with many weak and failed states such as Somalia enjoying juridical sovereignty conferred largely by the recognition of other states, but not *de facto* sovereignty, judged by its capacity to exercise some control in the Weberian sense over its national territory. In the case of Somalia, the subnational autonomous entities of Puntland and Somaliland, although lacking juridical sovereignty, hold *de facto* sovereignty in that they can assert a limited monopoly over the use of force and provide basic public goods to their populations. Basket-case states such as Somalia, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are kept on life support through varying levels of international aid, even though they feature few of the characteristics of Weberian statehood. Research shows that life goes on in the world's ungoverned spaces, with local populations resorting to informal networks, traditional structures, and customary law to infuse a degree of order and predictability in seemingly anarchic conditions,<sup>26</sup> but the absence of functioning governance structures at the national and subnational level lessens the ability of these populations to adequately

harness the full benefits of global interaction and to implement broader strategies of sustainable development.

An argument can be made that retuning to the pre-liberal logic of allowing weak and dysfunctional state units to fail could potentially produce more stable, legitimate, and peaceful entities less prone to internal tumult.<sup>27</sup> Remaining on the sidelines while states implode, however, leaves no guarantee that something more stable and peaceful will emerge from the rubble. Furthermore, even if the failure of one state leads to the creation of one or more stable entities, this process could take decades or even a generation. In the meantime, those transition or protostates could still project threats into the international system and unleash humanitarian crises that would demand the attention of the international community.

**The Containment Model.** The predominant form of state-building during the Cold War era involved the sponsorship of authoritarian regimes capable of asserting a monopoly over the use of force, preventing the export of insecurity, and bolstering the ideological ranks of one of the superpower camps. Although security assistance dominated these Cold War patron-client relationships, thereby creating robust and often overweight security apparatuses in the client country, a range of other forms of aid in the economic and governance sectors was provided. After all, the Cold War was as much an ideological competition over developmental models in the Third World as it was a realpolitik, geostrategic game. The Third World was a showcase for the two ideological blocs as well as a battleground. In that environment, client regimes and rebel movements were not merely passive actors but could exert significant agency in manipulating superpower competition to advance their own interests.

The security support provided during the Cold War was almost universally “train and equip” by nature. It typically did not take the human security needs of the population into account; it was the safety of the regime that was of primary concern. The democratic character of the client regime and quality of governance that it provided was secondary to the goal of empowering a partner capable of containing the export of security threats and the spread of opposing ideology. Support to the Soviet-backed Warsaw Pact states as well as the U.S.-allied regimes in Latin America and the Middle East typified this containment model. Perhaps the best examples, though, were the U.S. and Soviet engagements in Afghanistan and Vietnam, respectively. These were comprehensive, multifaceted state-building projects whose primary pillars were massive train-and-equip security assistance programs. In both cases, the main goal of the intervention was twofold: to contain the potential security threat posed by the client territory and to create a bulwark against rival ideological expansionism.

Expanding the coercive power of the state, an area in which donors have shown some capacity as compared to their poor record in encouraging democratic governance, can have a stabilizing effect. However, such a strategy can also have the perverse impact of stoking conflict and instability, provoking, for instance, revolutionary fervor among recipient state populations chafing under predatory security force repression. Moreover, the behavior of authoritarian regimes is difficult to predict, as the former U.S. client-turned-enemy and global pariah Saddam Hussein showed, raising the specter of blowback from assistance programs. Train-and-equip support for the mujahideen anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan in the 1980s, channeled through the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence

Directorate, also typifies the dangerous ramifications of apolitical train-and-equip assistance. Many of those mujahideen groups would, after the fall of the Soviet-backed government, morph into a variety of militant Islamic fundamentalist groupings with anti-U.S. and anti-Western agendas. Alliances shift, geopolitical conditions change, and both dictatorial regimes and rebel groups with advanced weaponry and training can pose as great a threat to international order as weak or failed states.

many state-building projects tend to gradually focus more on creating an environment of “controlled insecurity” than inaugurating a wholly new political order

Some would argue that even contemporary liberal state-building projects reflect more a policy of containment than liberal transformation. By virtue of the limitations of donor assistance in both quality and scope, many state-building projects tend to gradually focus more on creating an environment of “controlled insecurity” than inaugurating a wholly new political order.<sup>28</sup> Take Afghanistan following the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. Western states set about to create a stable Western-oriented democracy. Facing a growing Taliban insurgency, a burgeoning drug trade, and endemic state corruption, that objective was recast as any outcome that is remotely stable—or “Afghan good enough” as it has been dubbed in Western political and military circles—in less than a decade. This good enough approach to democratization, good governance, and development programming is gaining momentum in the Western development community. This seemingly pragmatic moderation of the ambitious liberal objectives of the

state-building project, labeled by some critics as “the bigotry of low expectations,” reflects growing skepticism and ambivalence over the West’s ability to apply the liberal state-building paradigm abroad.

Support for this form of principled containment, based on the one hand in a belief in the inapplicability of the orthodox liberal approach, and on the other, the interests of donors in establishing particular types of regimes capable of mitigating global security challenges, appears to be growing. Such a strategy may be couched and framed with liberal values, but the containment of threat is the paramount consideration.

**The Liberal Model.** The liberal state-building model represents the dominant policy paradigm guiding contemporary state-building projects. Fundamentally, the aim of the liberal model is to implant Western democratic states that can seamlessly integrate into the liberal international political order and free market economic system. It is inextricably linked to the liberal peace hypothesis, the presumption that democratic arrangements and neoliberal economics are the best institutional arrangements for security and conflict prevention. Among the ingredients of the model are early national elections, constitution-making, empowerment of civil society, and liberalization of the economy. The liberal model takes on different forms in practice, whether an international or domestic trusteeship arrangement, as was the case in Timor-Leste and Bosnia-Herzegovina, or a more conventional multidimensional peace support mission as seen in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The means may vary, but the liberal statist objectives remain the same.

This ambitious project of societal transformation draws on the historical precedent of post-World War II Germany and Japan. Both were shattered and defeated authoritarian states

that were rebuilt and remodeled in the decades after the war into paragons of liberal democracy with the aid and assistance of the West. The German and Japanese experiences shaped modern state-building doctrine, a problematic reality considering that contemporary state-building cases exhibit dramatically different conditions and challenges than those prevalent in postwar Germany and Japan. Both countries featured strong state traditions, stable security and political environments, well-educated populations, and a semblance of democratic tradition. Today's fragile and failing states, by contrast, tend to be comparably small, deeply impoverished, ethnically and politically divided entities featuring little in the way of statist or democratic traditions. Moreover, the state-builders in Germany and Japan had more resources (a Marshall Plan) and longer timeframes to work with. The ghost of the Marshall Plan is often evoked by contemporary state-builders to symbolize donor resolve, but that type of financial and political commitment rarely materializes. In the wake of the global financial crisis, that type of financial largesse and political resolve is even less likely to appear in the foreseeable future.

The problems of the liberal model do not stem solely from its audacious aspirations—the imposition of Western state structures in non-Western environments—but the tactics and process it employs and the ways in which those structures are established and consolidated. It is not a matter of fragile and developing states and their peoples not being capable of democracy, as some Eurocentric critics of liberalism argue. Many democratic principles are inherent in indigenous governance traditions and norms outside of the West, albeit differing in their social and institutional manifestations. The problem lies in both the unwillingness of Western donors to recognize and make space for

those traditions in their state-building policies and programming, and the seemingly irresistible urge to drive the transformation process as quickly and cheaply as possible. What results from this lack of local adaptation or contextualization coupled with impatience, risk aversion, and relative frugality is a form of state-building that is both superficial and coercive.<sup>29</sup> It is superficial in that it tends to create structures above local political dynamics and societal norms, is unable or unwilling to engage them, and is impatient in its reluctance to accept the generational and resource-intensive nature of the project.

**the ghost of the Marshall Plan is often evoked by contemporary state-builders to symbolize donor resolve, but that type of financial and political commitment rarely materializes**

The recent Afghanistan and Iraq interventions provide cautionary tales of the limitations of the liberal peace. In both cases, a transformative liberal state-building project was launched even after initial reluctance and a false start in Afghanistan, which largely sought to supplant existing norms, structures, and political elites. Over time, however, the immense costs of the project, coupled with major security and political challenges, led to the streamlining of timelines and objectives, leaving behind vulnerable institutions whose long-term sustainability can be questioned. A “slide toward expediency” occurred in both countries; when the demands and challenges of the liberal peace- and state-building project became too burdensome and costly, many of their fundamental principles were sacrificed to advance more expedient solutions that tend to resemble strategies of containment.<sup>30</sup>

Today's state-builders are constrained from making long-term and adequately intensive commitments due to rapidly changing news cycles—the CNN effect—and short democratic electoral cycles that caution against long-term commitments particularly when it comes to overseas engagements. This raises a fundamental question: Are Western democracies even capable of successfully implementing the orthodox liberal state-building model? Without a radical shift in the way Western policymakers conceive of the challenge of state-building and the type of investment needed to address it, the answer appears to be no.

The liberal model's position that state-building encapsulates an indivisible package of universal reforms has bred inflexibility in the concept and a tendency to transpose the model, at least in its conceptual form, from one context to the next with little variation. It becomes almost a zero-sum game; we apply the liberal model in its comprehensive form or we employ "hard" security containment strategies. Experience, however, has shown that variation in approaches—a middle ground so to speak—based on the unique socioeconomic, cultural, historical, and political milieus of each state-building case can deliver more meaningful impacts. If indeed state-building were merely a technical process requiring out-of-the-box solutions, then the apolitical and acontextual liberal model would be effective. In actuality, state-building has been shown to be an intricately political process affecting, altering, and unsettling power relationships and creating winners and losers. Such a messy and fluid environment demands a process that is intuitive, flexible, and adaptable—characteristics that the liberal model does not have in abundance. Even when favorable conditions exist for the liberal model, the process demands the type of societal

transformation that can last decades or even a generation, amid inevitable turmoil, a type of commitment few state-builders have shown the resolve to support. The liberal model may just be too ambitious to achieve in practice.

***The Post-liberal Model.*** The post-liberal model does not advocate a jettisoning of liberal principles, but rather the recognition of their limitations when imposed blindly and rigidly as a state-building package. It is particularly the transformative ambition of the liberal model that this variation of it seeks to moderate by favoring a merging or reconciling of local governance and political traditions with liberal norms and structures. The liberal model pays homage to notions of local ownership, cited as indispensable for its success, but these ideals are rarely translated into genuine local agency and leadership. After all, "ownership" for liberal state-builders tends in practice to translate into the "buy-in" of like-minded groups and elites, those that already subscribe to the liberal ethos and worldview. Those outside of this club are treated as politically marginal and illegitimate, regardless of their local standing, power, and size of their constituencies. This is one of the principal contradictions of the model; it seeks to establish a participatory democracy, but only for avowed liberal democrats. Ownership is, by contrast, the central preoccupation of the post-liberal model. It favors the consultation of as wide a range of stakeholders as possible, regardless of their political or ideological orientations, recognizing that some semblance of consensus, even among potential spoilers, is required to build a sustainable democratic state.

The post-liberal model differs from its liberal cousin in its willingness to tolerate and support semidemocratic and even partially anti-democratic structures and practices, either as a transitional step toward a more orthodox liberal



Members of Kandahar PRT conduct site survey of bazaar



U.S. Air Force (Tim Chacon)

democratic order or as an endstate in itself, as long as those practices and structures are locally legitimate, operationally effective, and not inconsistent with basic human rights. The Emergency Loya Jirga process in Afghanistan in 2002, a traditional grand assembly that chose the first post-Taliban interim government, represents the type of loosely democratic and locally legitimate process that the post-liberal model seeks to empower and support. The formation of the Sunni Awakening Councils in Iraq, which empowered the Sunni tribes to support U.S.-led counterinsurgency operations, is another such example.

It is important to note, however, that the post-liberal model does not take a cultural relativist approach toward core liberal principles. It recognizes that some principles are universal, like the right to live free from physical harm, inhumane treatment, and torture. Structures or actors that violate such fundamental rights are irredeemable to the model regardless of their political credentials or cultural pedigrees. There is middle ground between the complete violation of liberal principles and the rigid application of a liberal approach, and this is where the post-liberal model lives.

At its core, the post-liberal model affirms that there are different paths to liberal democracy that can emanate from a variety of different governance and political traditions. Not all non-liberal, non-Western traditions are incompatible with democracy, as the liberal model implicitly suggests. For that matter, no tradition or system is static; all evolve and are capable of change in an evolutionary or revolutionary manner. The post-liberal model seeks to catalyze the type of evolutionary change that is both more stable politically and more viable historically than its liberal counterpart. The revolutionary shock therapy of the liberal model tends to arouse conflict and instability as much as it assuages or contains it.

The spatial and geographic focus of the post-liberal model is not confined to the center of the recipient state, capital city, and central government as it has characteristically been for the liberal model. Rather, it accords equal if not greater attention to the local or subnational governance level, which is characteristically the main interface between state and population, and thus the key to establishing

**hastily erected liberal edifices often propped up by donor largesse tend to be vulnerable and unsustainable**

the legitimacy of state-building projects. The post-liberal model does not ignore the central state, which plays an indispensable role in national-level governance processes, but places a particular emphasis on forms of authority closest to the population. After all, as the saying goes, “all politics is local,” and it is the most legitimate local political actors, structures, and norms that will be best positioned to shepherd the transition (or spoil it if they so choose). It is of little surprise that donors tend to gravitate to the central government level, given the strong central state tradition of Western donors. The move to focus more on the local than the national is driven by the reality that decentralized approaches tend to better reflect power and socioeconomic dynamics in fragile and conflict-affected states where central authority has been absent for some time, if ever present at all.

Alongside its acceptance and nurturance of local leaders, structures, and norms including the informal and nonstate, the post-liberal model is distinct from its orthodox counterpart in its emphasis on service delivery over premature political processes such as democratic elections. There is no shortage of literature

outlining the dangers of premature elections,<sup>31</sup> which in contexts such as Angola led to renewed conflict and in places such as Bosnia triggered a toxic and paralyzing polarization and ethnicization of the political system. While the post-liberal model does not deny the transformative power of elections and their importance in consolidating democratic rule, they cannot be effectively carried out in the absence of a stable institutional framework.<sup>32</sup> Without that framework, a complex logistical undertaking such as an election can only be accomplished with overwhelming international tutelage and support. The dangers of sensitive political processes in a transition situation being funded and orchestrated by a foreign actor are manifold. Such elections will be open to allegations of foreign interference and accusations of illegitimacy, and they can create a relationship of dependency on foreign actors to maintain the democratic process.

Even when liberal orders are successfully established, they are prone to reversals and the restoration of authoritarianism or conflict and fragility. In other words, hastily erected liberal edifices often propped up by donor largesse tend to be vulnerable and unsustainable. Transition states must be built to withstand the vicissitudes of donor aid cycles and attention spans. This demonstrates, above all else, the need for organic structures and actors capable of owning and driving societal change—while embracing some core liberal values—and underwriting it over the long term, primarily (albeit not entirely) through domestic resources. Donor support in aid and human resources will inevitably be required for either the liberal or post-liberal (although much less in scale) models to work. Where the post-liberal model differs is its emphasis from the outset of the process on the economic sustainability of reforms, accepting

that the very purpose of the process is to create self-sustaining independent states, not satellite clients or dependencies.

Some of the outcomes of post-liberal strategies may be illiberal and even run contrary to donor interests, at least in the short term. But by offering more sustainable and legitimate solutions to local level problems, the outcomes will, over the long term, make a stronger contribution to collective security. For instance, nonstate and informal structures, norms, and actors in many contexts violate human rights. Empowering those actors could inadvertently encourage corruption, discriminatory behavior, or the abuse of power. However, these phenomena are not exclusive to nonstate or traditional forms of authority. Formal state governance structures in fragile, failed, and conflict-affected states typically feature predatory behavior. In fact, nonstate bodies often rise to prominence as a reaction to the abuses and excesses of the state. It is estimated that up to 80 percent of disputes in fragile and conflict-affected states are resolved through nonstate and informal bodies rather than the state. When people have choice in these contexts, they tend to opt for informal authority because it is seen as more legitimate and cost-effective and less corrupt than state offices. The reality is that stronger states are not always the best means to deliver better services, and most importantly security, to communities in fragile and conflict-affected environments.

The post-liberal model can be conceived of as a form of pragmatic liberalism. Currently, it is more aspirational than tangible as only elements of the model have been implemented on an ad hoc basis in practice, and these notions are only beginning to percolate and gain adherence among the major international donor organizations invested in the state-building project. Although most state-builders recognize that the

liberal model, like its Siamese twin the liberal peace, is rarely actualized in practice and is riddled with damaging contradictions, it nonetheless remains the cornerstone of Western development and state-building doctrine. Perhaps it is the model that donors are most comfortable with because it reaffirms their core values and self-image as the pinnacle of development—“the end of history,” so to speak.<sup>33</sup>

The post-liberal model is not devoid of drawbacks. It will still take a long time to implement and demands the type of resolve from international actors that we have already established to be the exception rather than the rule. Striking a balance between local norms and liberal values is far from an easy undertaking and will require deep and nuanced understanding of the local environment that donors have shown scant ability to acquire. Strategies and approaches inspired by the post-liberal model that are built with inadequate knowledge of local circumstances can do as much harm as an overambitious liberal model.

There is of course the danger of the post-liberal model overly romanticizing the local in the recipient society, believing that it can save the state-building project as much as the liberal model presumes to be able to save the locals. This is a genuine concern often deployed by hardened supporters of the orthodox liberal model to resist any deviation from its prescriptions. While caution is warranted, the liberal default position in the field that local informal elites and their indigenous traditions are anachronistic and even tainted in some fashion is even more pernicious.

Nonetheless, the potential dangers of making bargains with illiberal local actors, norms, and structures is real and can irrevocably undermine the more limited liberal character of the project. The post-liberal model

could indeed give birth to stable but illiberal states. Considering the poor record of success of the orthodox liberal model and the limitations of donors in driving the type of transformative change it entails, taking such risks is necessary. The bottom line, as the post-liberal model sees it, is that liberal principles can only be enshrined or embedded in practice by contextualizing and mediating them. Just as those principles were embedded in the West through particular historical experiences, they must evolve in today's new transition states through locally legitimate and organic processes of political change, with some enabling support from donors. The result may be somewhat unpredictable and will not be a carbon copy of a Western state, but will likely feature many liberal characteristics.

**the post-liberal model has yet to be fully elaborated, but it is conceptualized with the imperative in mind that state-building policies must be infinitely flexible and adaptable depending on societal circumstances and conditions**

### Conclusion

Different approaches can be deployed to confront the problem of fragile, failed, and conflict-affected states. A strategy of benign neglect is not a viable option given that weak states directly threaten the human security of their citizens, creating humanitarian crises and, perhaps more important from the standpoint of donors, acting as exporters of insecurity and instability. Containment may bottle up basket-case states in the short term, but it does not provide a sustainable solution over the long term, opening the door for the reemergence or even mutation of

crises. Though pre-liberal benign neglect or Cold War containment may not be viable options for state-building anymore, the liberal model has not proved to be much more effective at minimizing the domestic human suffering caused by state failure or containing the existential threats such states pose to the global community. It is clear that new approaches and paradigms are needed, and it is the contention of this article that a pared-down and acculturated liberal model that is both more humble and more realistic can, with the right investment of resources by donors, achieve a level of sustainable stability in recipient states. It is a more pragmatic approach that seeks to work with realities on the ground rather than around or above them and engages a wide spectrum of actors outside of the liberal- or Western-oriented class. This new model, referred to here as the post-liberal model, has yet to be fully elaborated, but it is conceptualized with the imperative in mind that state-building policies must be infinitely flexible and adaptable depending on societal circumstances and conditions.

There is much to learn from the state-building experience since the end of the Cold War, even with few clear success stories to build on. While significant time and attention have been dedicated to this issue in the academic and policy communities, robust centers of excellence are in short supply, which perhaps explains how seemingly slow it has been for emergent “lessons learned” to trigger changes in policy and practice. We have learned the hard way over the past decade, borrowing from a truism of development practice, that bad state-building can do harm, and if donors are not willing to invest the resources to get the formula right, it is best to avoid engagement at all. The time is right for innovation in the state-building project, but first, straightjacket donors must break out of the of the liberal model. **PRISM**

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Neil A. Englehart, “In Defence of State Building: States, Rights, and Justice,” *Dissent* (Fall 2003), 20.
- <sup>2</sup> *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2010), 46.
- <sup>3</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, “A Grand Strategy,” *Foreign Policy* (November–December, 2002), 50.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> Gary T. Dempsey, “Nation-Building’s Newest Disguise,” *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs* 46, no. 3 (2002), 416.
- <sup>6</sup> For a comparison of the state-building projects in Germany and Japan with contemporary cases, see James Dobbins et al., *America’s Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2003).
- <sup>7</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, “Failed States in a World of Terror,” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4 (2002), 128.
- <sup>8</sup> Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, 2002), 37.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> Ronnie D. Lipschutz, “Negotiating the Boundaries of Difference and Security at Millennium’s End,” in *On Security*, ed. Ronnie D. Lipschutz, 225 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).
- <sup>11</sup> James Der Derian, “The Value of Security: Hobbes, Marx, Nietzsche, and Baudrillard,” in *On Security*, 25.
- <sup>12</sup> Tarak Barkawi, “On the Pedagogy of ‘Small Wars,’” *International Affairs* 80, no. 1 (June 2004), 19.
- <sup>13</sup> Ole Wæver, “Securitization and Desecuritization,” in *On Security*, 187; Michael G. Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation-Building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan* (London: Vintage, 2003), 3.
- <sup>14</sup> Ignatieff, 11.
- <sup>15</sup> Minxin Pei, “Lessons of the Past,” *Foreign Policy* (July–August 2003), 52.
- <sup>16</sup> Amitai Etzioni, “A Self-restrained Approach to Nation-building by Foreign Powers,” *International Affairs* 80, no. 1 (2004), 16; Marina Ottaway, “Nation Building,” *Foreign Policy* (September–October 2002), 16–24.
- <sup>17</sup> Etzioni, 16; Ottaway, 22.
- <sup>18</sup> Etzioni, 2.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.
- <sup>20</sup> Stewart Patrick, “The Brutal Truth,” *Foreign Policy*, July–August 2011.
- <sup>21</sup> Ignatieff, 115.
- <sup>22</sup> Dawn Brancati and Jack L. Snyder, “Rushing to the Polls: The Causes of Premature Post-Conflict Elections,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 3 (2011), 470.
- <sup>23</sup> Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and the European States, AD 990–1992* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1992).
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>25</sup> For different schools of thought on sovereignty, see Stephen D. Krasner, “Sharing Sovereignty: New Institutions for Collapsed and Failing States,” in *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World*, ed. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall, 653–678 (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007); and International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001).
- <sup>26</sup> For a good example of how societies can cope in the absence of formal state governance, see Ken Menkhaus, “Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building, and the Politics of Coping,” *International Security* 31, no. 3 (Winter 2006/2007), 74–106.

<sup>27</sup> Mohammed Ayoob, “State Making, State Breaking, and State Failure,” ed. Crocker, Hampson, and Aall, 95–114.

<sup>28</sup> Susan L. Woodward, “In Whose Interest Is Security Sector Reform? Lessons from the Balkans,” in *Governing Insecurity: Democratic Control of Military and Security Establishments in Transitional Democracies*, ed. Gavin Cawthra and Robin Luckham, 279 (London: Zed Books, 2003).

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion on “coercive democratization,” see Marina Ottaway, “Is Democracy the Answer?” ed. Crocker, Hampson, and Aall, 603–618.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Sedra, “Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan: The Slide Toward Expediency,” *International Peacekeeping* 13, no. 1 (2006), 94–110.

<sup>31</sup> For analysis on the dangers of premature elections see Ottaway, “Is Democracy the Answer?” and Jochen Hippler, “Democratization After Civil Wars—Key Problems and Experiences,” *Democratization* 15, no. 3 (2008), 550–569.

<sup>32</sup> Roland Paris, *At War’s End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1993).

# Capability Traps in Development<sup>1</sup>

## How Initiatives to Improve Administrative Systems Succeed at Failing

BY LANT PRITCHETT, MICHAEL WOOLCOCK, AND MATT ANDREWS

In many nations today, the state has little capability to implement even basic functions such as security, policing, regulation, or core service delivery. Enhancing this capability, especially in fragile states, is a long-term task.<sup>2</sup> As we document in this article, countries such as Haiti and Liberia will take many decades to reach even a moderate capability country such as India, and millennia to reach the capability of Singapore. Short-term programmatic efforts to build administrative capability in these countries are thus unlikely to demonstrate actual success, yet billions of dollars continue to be spent on such activities. What techniques enable states to “buy time” to enable reforms to work, mask nonaccomplishment, or actively resist or deflect the internal and external pressures for improvement? How do donors and recipient countries manage to engage in the logics of “development” for so long and yet consistently acquire so little administrative capability? In short, how do initiatives to modernize administrative systems so often succeed at failing?

Our central contention is that many developing countries are stuck in what we call a *capability trap*—a dynamic that enables officials to document instances of apparent reform and thus assure a continued flow of development resources to their country or sector, despite the fact that the reforms themselves may be generating few actual improvements in performance. Capability traps

Dr. Lant Pritchett is Professor of the Practice of International Development at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. Dr. Michael Woolcock is Lead Social Development Specialist in the Development Research Group at the World Bank. Dr. Matt Andrews is Assistant Professor of Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. The views expressed in this article are those of the authors alone, and should not be attributed to the organizations with which they are affiliated.



have four distinctive and interrelated features. First, they consistently conflate institutional form with function—that is, donors and putative reformers alike presume that what organizations look like (their formal rules, reporting lines, mission statements, and so forth) largely determines what they do.<sup>3</sup> Thus, passing a labor law, for example, or conducting an extensive training program for teachers can count as a positive instance of reform even if it in no way changes the actual everyday experience of workers or improves student learning. Second,

**the presumption is that the pace of change achieved by the fastest reformers is both desirable and possible elsewhere**

such reforms are based on a theory of change that regards the adoption of best practices, as determined by experiences elsewhere or international experts, as the most efficient and ethical strategy for rapidly modernizing domestic administrative systems. This approach to development, as one observer dryly put it, can be characterized as “history in a hurry.” Third, capability traps are characterized by excessively great expectations. An extension of the best practice logic, the presumption is that the pace of change achieved by the fastest reformers is both desirable and possible elsewhere; after all, to suggest anything less would make one an apologist for non-best-practice solutions, a profligate who wastes resources by “reinventing the wheel.” Thus, we expect Haiti to reform at the pace of Vietnam. Fourth, having set such unrealistic expectations, we then overwhelm nascent initiatives by prematurely asking too much of too little too soon, thereby not only ensuring failure but (by failing *in this way*) undermining the very legitimacy of reform and

dissipating the substantive learning that may have accompanied it thus far.

### Some Numbers, an Example, a Theory

How do countries become and remain mired in a capability trap? While there are obviously many deep, structural, and interrelated *causes* (political, social, economic) of *why* countries fail, we are interested in *how* countries fail. That is, what are the techniques that allow and facilitate state failure in a modern world—one in which many agencies promote the expansion of state capability? To account for these factors, and to better identify potential strategies for escaping from capability traps, we need a basic theoretical framework. Before outlining such a theory, however, it is instructive to consider some general data documenting the capability trap phenomenon, as well as a concrete instance of capability traps in action. Our particular example comes from reforms in public financial management in Mozambique, but we could readily cite numerous other instances in different sectors in a range of countries (and not only developing countries).

First, consider some numbers. Relatively straightforward calculations of government effectiveness, derived from various databases, allow us to show just how long it has taken for countries to improve their administrative capability. For example, the International Country Risk Guide (ICRG) indicators of “bureaucratic quality” and “corruption” can be used to document state capability, not least because the median rate of country improvement for both indicators is zero. The table shows the time it would take for the bottom 30 countries to reach Singapore’s level of measured bureaucratic quality or lack of corruption using either a country’s own measured pace of change or its average pace of change. If anything, these numbers are

more striking because nearly all of the bottom 30 countries have had *negative* rates of change of bureaucratic quality and corruption over the whole period studied and hence the estimated time is *infinity* (it takes forever to get somewhere if one goes in the opposite direction). Moreover, even if the bottom 30 countries, by current bureaucratic quality, were to improve to the *average* pace of improvement, it would still take hundreds of years (since these numbers are discrete, they are “lumpy”). Since the *average* pace is negative when considering corruption, it would take forever at that pace for all countries.

To make these aggregate trends more concrete, consider Mozambique, which emerged from conflict nearly two decades ago and has effected far-reaching changes to its governance systems ever since. In many respects, the country’s progress is impressive, reflected in multiple peaceful elections and transitions in top leadership, for example, and reforms to public financial management (PFM) processes that have resulted in a system that compares favorably with African peers. Mozambique’s PFM system comes out as stronger than all African countries apart from South Africa and Mauritius when assessed using the donor-defined criteria of good PFM, the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) assessment framework.<sup>4</sup> It has revised PFM laws and introduced a state-of-the-art information system, e-SISTAFE, through which money now flows more efficiently than ever before.

But there are some disconcerting problems, as reflected in PEFA measures and self-assessments by government officials. Budget processes are strong and budget documents are exemplary, but execution largely remains a black box. Information about execution risks is poor, with deficiencies in internal controls, audits, and in-year monitoring systems, and weak or unheard

of reporting from service delivery units and the politically powerful, high-spending state-owned enterprises. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there are many questions about the extent and quality of implementation of new laws and systems and what really happens in the day-to-day functionality of the PFM system. The questions

**officials in line ministries, departments, and agencies note that the new laws and systems are part of the problem**

emerge most clearly when considering that PEFA indicators reflecting de jure changes in form are above average while PEFA dimensions reflecting de facto implementation and functional adjustment are only average. When asked about this, officials in line ministries, departments, and agencies note that the new laws and systems are part of the problem. They may look impressive but are often poorly fitted to the needs of those using them, requiring management capacities users do not have and institutionalizing organizational scripts and allocation modalities that reflect international best practice but not political and organizational realities on the ground. These officials note that they were never asked about the kind of system needed, and while recognizing the impressive nature of the new PFM system, they lament the missed opportunity to craft a system that works to solve their specific needs.<sup>5</sup>

As noted, to better understand this type of dynamic and the capability trap to which it gives rise, we need a basic theory. To this end, the dynamics of enacting a given development project or policy can be construed as occurring within an ecological space comprising three constituent elements: *agents* (leaders, managers, and frontline staff), *organizations* (firms,

Table. Years for country to achieve high bureaucratic quality or low corruption (Singapore's level) at either its own observed rate of progress since 1985 or at the average pace of all countries

Bureaucratic Quality			Lack of Corruption		
Worst 30 countries in current level	At own past pace (if negative, then $\infty$ )	At the average pace of improvement for all countries, 1985–2009	Worst 30 countries in current level	At own past pace (if negative, then $\infty$ )	At the average pace of improvement for all countries, 1985–2009
Côte d'Ivoire	$\infty$	503	Zimbabwe	$\infty$	$\infty$
North Korea	$\infty$	503	Kenya	$\infty$	$\infty$
Sierra Leone	$\infty$	503	North Korea	$\infty$	$\infty$
Somalia	$\infty$	503	Somalia	$\infty$	$\infty$
Togo	$\infty$	503	Lebanon	$\infty$	$\infty$
Zaire	$\infty$	503	Papua New Guinea	$\infty$	$\infty$
Haiti	$\infty$	503	Venezuela	$\infty$	$\infty$
Liberia	$\infty$	503	Sudan	$\infty$	$\infty$
Mali	$\infty$	503	Paraguay	$\infty$	$\infty$
Russia	$\infty$	377	Haiti	84	$\infty$
Yemen	$\infty$	377	DRC	65	$\infty$
Burkina Faso	$\infty$	377	Iraq	$\infty$	$\infty$
Madagascar	$\infty$	377	Albania	$\infty$	$\infty$
Mozambique	$\infty$	377	Algeria	$\infty$	$\infty$
Senegal	$\infty$	377	Malawi	$\infty$	$\infty$
Venezuela	$\infty$	377	Niger	$\infty$	$\infty$
DRC	$\infty$	377	Libya	$\infty$	$\infty$
Libya	$\infty$	377	Ghana	$\infty$	$\infty$
Nigeria	$\infty$	377	Jamaica	$\infty$	$\infty$
Nicaragua	$\infty$	377	Myanmar	$\infty$	$\infty$
Zambia	$\infty$	377	Nigeria	$\infty$	$\infty$
Myanmar	72	377	Togo	$\infty$	$\infty$
Paraguay	72	377	Sierra Leone	$\infty$	$\infty$
Romania	72	377	Costa Rica	$\infty$	$\infty$
Sudan	72	377	Russia	$\infty$	$\infty$

**Table. Years for country to achieve high bureaucratic quality or low corruption (Singapore's level) at either its own observed rate of progress since 1985 or at the average pace of all countries (cont.)**

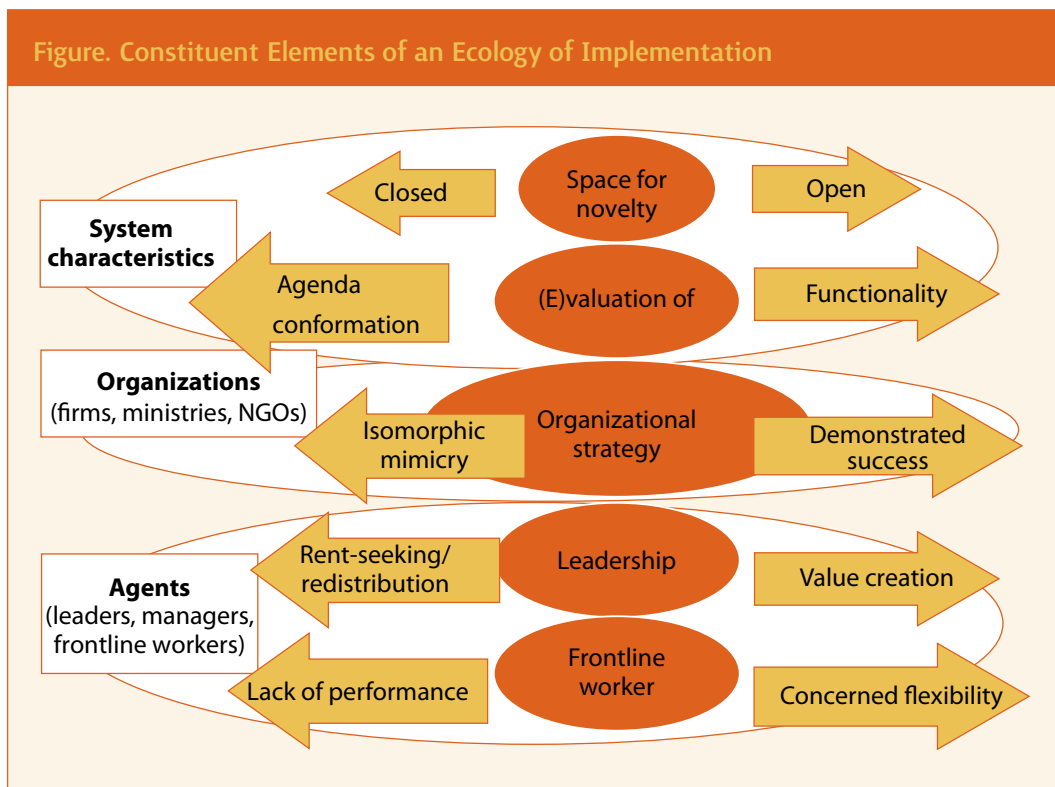
Tanzania	72	377	Mongolia	∞	∞
Gabon	∞	377	Burkina Faso	∞	∞
Cameroon	∞	314	Bulgaria	∞	∞
Niger	∞	314	Mozambique	∞	∞
Zimbabwe	∞	314	Greece	∞	∞

*Source: Authors' calculations with PRS ICRG data.*

nongovernmental organizations [NGOs], line ministries), and *systems* (the broader administrative and political apparatus under whose jurisdiction the activity falls). See figure. Such an ecological space is not static; rather it is one that must engage with multiple ongoing tensions (imperatives and incentives) that characterize this space and that either reward or inhibit innovation. Frontline workers, for example, have certain levels of training and experience (“capacity”), but their professional energy can be expended in a range of activities, from malfeasance, to mere compliance with rules, to working within the spirit of the rules to customize responses to the particular needs of clients. Similarly, the managers of frontline workers (“leaders”) can use the resources and rents over which they have responsibility to further their own purposes (“elite capture”) or to enhance broader wealth creation. For development to occur, it is clearly preferable that such agents pursue the latter alternatives, but whether they do so is less a function of their individual talents and proclivities than the incentives they face and normative expectations that characterize their work environment.

Agents work within organizations: governmental line ministries, parastatal organizations, NGOs, firms, and international agencies. These organizations have actual or inferred administrative mandates to address particular sectoral issues, but the legitimacy of their actions—which often entail making hard tradeoffs, bearing responsibility for controversial outcomes, and continuing to function in difficult, uncertain, or underresourced circumstances—rests on two primary sources: demonstrated accomplishment (credibility and confidence are earned through providing services in a sufficiently effective and equitable manner), and/or appeal to external policies and programs that have been deemed to work elsewhere (“we can legitimately perform this complex task in this way in this place because it seems to have achieved the desired result ‘over there’; moreover, these international experts have even declared it a ‘global best practice’”).

The actions of agents are fundamentally concerned with upholding the legitimacy of their organizations, but it is thus crucial which form this legitimacy—demonstrated accomplishment or mimicry—takes. If their organizations’ legitimacy stems from accomplishment, agents will face incentives that reward innovation and “bureaucratic entrepreneurial” behavior; if from mimicry, they will just follow the rules even more closely as conditions deteriorate and



uncertainty rises. All this, of course, raises the question of the conditions under which a given organization’s legitimacy stems from accomplishment or mimicry. Our framework points to broader system characteristics: in particular, the proclivity of the system to require, recognize, and reward novelty.

In a canonical open market system, for example, effective regulation and the quest for profit maximization does all three: it requires novelty (to develop superior products and services), it recognizes novelty (it is able to distinguish genuine from trivial innovation), and it rewards novelty (via compensation, prestige, and promotion). Under the worst forms of socialism, at the other extreme, novelty was actively suppressed with constituent organizations and agents acting almost entirely to uphold rules (at best), and dealing with contingencies by creating yet more rules.<sup>6</sup> Agents pretended to work and organizations pretended to pay them because that is what the system’s characteristics decreed. It could perform certain tasks for a short time but was utterly inflexible.

Understood as a process of sustaining processes of genuine innovation, development is about moving the ecological equilibrium from the left to right (see figure). Put differently, modernization that works is an ongoing process of discovering and encouraging the diverse context-specific institutional forms that lead to higher functionality. Characteristically, however, responses to project/policy failure (or explanations of success, for that matter) focus only on individual elements of this ecology (capacity-building for frontline staff, concern that best practices are not being

followed, and so forth) that are legible to and actionable by external actors. We argue that it is the broader fitness environment of this ecology for its constituent elements that primarily shapes observed outcomes.

### Some Clarifications

First, in expressing deep concerns about the dangers of isomorphic mimicry—or what another observer calls “institutional monocropping”<sup>7</sup>—and its associated quest for “global best practice” solutions to development problems, we recognize that certain *types* of problems can and should be addressed in this manner. If a cure for cancer or a low-cost procedure for desalinating water is ever invented, the more rapidly it can be made available to everyone the better. Our concern, building on an earlier formulation,<sup>8</sup> is that for certain development problems the quest for *the* solution is itself the problem, and this is especially so in matters pertaining to political, legal, and organizational reform, where combinations of high discretionary decisionmaking and numerous face-to-face transactions are required to craft supportable solutions (plural).

Second, in stressing the virtues of ecological learning and encouraging multiple paths to high institutional performance, we are pushing back against—though not failing to appreciate the importance of—the Weberian ideal of a professionalized bureaucracy as the preferred mode of delivering core services. If Weberian organizations underpin modern economic and political life in high-income countries, is this not the goal to which low-income countries should aspire and move toward as quickly as possible? If we know what effective organizations look like—if they constitute, in effect, a global best practice—is it not both efficient and ethically desirable to introduce them as

soon as possible? Has anyone actually developed without them?

Our response to these concerns takes several forms. For starters, appearances can be deceiving. The education system in the Netherlands, for example, produces students who perform at (or slightly above) the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average, and from a distance the structure that presides over this may appear Weberian; closer scrutiny, however, reveals a system that is in many respects qualitatively different from its counterparts elsewhere in Europe and North America in that it essentially funds students to attend a school of their choosing. That is, Dutch education is not a large, centralized service-providing line ministry as it is elsewhere in the OECD, but rather a flat organizational structure that funds a highly decentralized ecology of different educational organizations. For present purposes, we make no normative judgment as to which system is better; our key point is that high standards of education demonstrably can be attained by a system that varies significantly from the canonical Weberian ideal.<sup>9</sup> A similar argument emerges from a close examination of countries with high governance scores.<sup>10</sup> Far from having identical Weberian characteristics, the administrative structures that underpin such countries instead exhibit an extraordinary variety of organization forms, some of them classically Weberian but many of them significantly different (for example, the relationship between banks and states in Japan versus the United Kingdom). Again, we make this point not to attack Weberian structures per se or to axiomatically celebrate alternatives, but rather to stress that the Weberian ideal is not inherently the gold standard to which everyone should aspire and

against which alternatives should be assessed. In short, a variety of organizational forms can deliver similar institutional performance levels, just as identical organizational forms (as in the colonial period) can give rise to diverse performance levels. Finally, even in the most celebrated cases of Weberian effectiveness, such as Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry, it is not clear that its effectiveness was achieved because of, or in spite of, its Weberian qualities.

had the profession of computer engineering itself been in a position of choosing innovation, the PC could have never emerged

The more vexing questions that our framework must confront center on strategies for recognizing and rewarding innovation in organizations that have a natural monopoly (for whatever reason). There should only be one police force, for example, so pressures that may facilitate innovation in competitive markets cannot really be harnessed; we do not want rival police forces. Similarly, for relatively routine (though clearly important) activities such as issuing a driver's license, there is likely to be a clear limit to how much innovation is actually desirable or possible. If the prevailing system works reasonably well, only the most marginal improvements need to be sought. Another set of issues turns on the question of how to overcome the classic Peter Principle problem: if organizations are inherently dysfunctional because (a) everyone rises to his level of incompetence and (b) promotion turns on achieving yesterday's core objectives rather than envisioning and realizing tomorrow's innovation, how can this logic be broken?

Finally, our framework must illuminate how genuinely useful innovation can be more reliably distinguished in real time from innovation for its own sake or from merely imitating best practice. Personal computers (PCs), for example, completely altered the world of computing, replacing mainframes as the dominant way in which everyday computing was conducted. At the time (1980s), PCs were a *disruptive* innovation in that they were an inferior technology—one that was dismissed by engineers at the “best” firms as mere toys for hobbyists.<sup>11</sup> But as the PC came to meet the actual functional objectives of the mass of users better than mainframes could, it was the “excellent” firms that were left by the wayside. Had the profession of computer engineering itself been in a position of choosing innovation, the PC could have never emerged—but markets had a space for novelty and a way of evaluating novelty so consumers could vote with their keyboards (and dollars) for the new technology. Within development agencies, one hears frequent reference to the quest for “cutting-edge thinking” and the importance of taking “innovative approaches,” but how can such agencies enhance the likelihood that PCs, rather than just new and improved mainframes, will emerge?

### Standard Responses to Systemic Failure

Providing answers to these questions requires an examination of how responses to failure are pursued within the prevailing development architecture. When policies or programs fail because of implementation failure, there are many good and bad options.

**Adopt a “Better” Policy.** One obvious response to failure is to assume that the reason for failure was that the policy, even if it had been faithfully implemented, would not have



accomplished the objective anyway; therefore, failure requires a new policy. However, even if the new policy is *demonstrably* better (in the sense that when implemented it leads to better outcomes), being equally (or more) organizationally stress-inducing in implementation will lead to further failure after a number of intervening years.

**Engage in “Capacity-building.”** One attractive and obvious response to policy implementation failure is to assume that the individual agents lacked capacity—that they could not have implemented the policy even if they wanted to. This is nearly always plausible, as policy implementation requires agents to recognize states of the world and to know what to do in each instance (for example, a nurse mandated to conduct community nutrition outreach has to be able to recognize a variety of symptoms and know which to treat, which to inform parents how to respond to, which patients to refer, and so forth). What could be a more obvious response of public sector failure in sector X (health, education, procurement, policing, regulation, justice) than to “train” health workers, teachers, procurement officers, police officers, regulators, lawyers—particularly as it will be demonstrably the case that “ideal capability” (that is, the organizational capability if all individuals worked to capacity) is low?<sup>12</sup> However, if the organization is under excessive stress due to the attempt to implement overambitious policies, the achievable increments to ideal capability may neither augment the “robustness” of the organization and hence be irrelevant in practice nor shift the entire capacity frontier outward far enough to actually avoid the low-level equilibrium. (In the figure, even substantial outward shifts in the low capability case would still lead to the equilibrium of zero implementation.)

**Cocoon Particular Projects/Programs/Sectors.** Another reaction to implementation failure, particularly when external assistance agencies (whether donors or NGOs) are involved, is to ensure “their” project succeeds in a low-capability environment by creating parallel systems. These parallel systems come in many varieties, from project implementation units to “bottom-up” channels in which funds are channeled directly to “communities.” The common difficulty with cocooning is that there is often no coherent plan as to how the cocooned success will scale to become the routine practice. In fact, cocooned implementation modes are often so resource intensive (in either scarce human capital resources “donated” by NGOs or financial resources) that they are not scalable. Again, cocooning is a valuable technique of persistent failure as one can have long strings of demonstrably successful projects while a sector itself never improves.

**Throw More Resources into It.** It is easy to see how isomorphic mimicry and premature load-bearing make a powerful partnership. When governments are carrying out necessary and desirable goals (for example, building roads, educating children, maintaining law and order) *and* are doing so by pursuing demonstrably successful policies (that is, policies whose effectiveness as a mapping from inputs to outcomes has been shown to achieve results when implemented) *and* are doing so through isomorphic organizational structures (for example, police forces or education ministries whose organizational charts and de jure operational manuals are identical to those in functional countries), then doubling down the bet seems the only viable strategy. After all, this is *known* to work because it works in Denmark. Because most

places with low state capability also have low productivity and hence the governments are working with few resources, it is hard not to believe that simply applying more resources to achieve good goals by implementing good policies through good organizations is the obvious if not the only strategy.

**external agents, whose presence is justified by the need to promote and fund progress, also play a strong role in generating and sustaining failure**

Not only are many bad options good, but some potentially good options are bad for both clients and donors:

- ❖ Scaling policies to the available implementation capability is often professionally and normatively unattractive.
- ❖ Expanding capability in ways that are perhaps more “robust” but which do not expand the “ideal” is often decidedly unattractive to development actors who prefer options that are “modern” and technically state-of-the-art.
- ❖ Attacking organizational failure is unattractive, as once an organization’s goals have been inverted to rent collection, these are often subsequently capitalized into the political system in ways that eliminate potential constituencies for organizational “reform.”

As techniques that can both produce and allow persistent failure, the dangers of isomorphic mimicry and premature load-bearing are pervasive precisely because they are attractive

to domestic reformers. But paradoxically, external agents, whose presence is justified by the need to promote and fund progress, also play a strong role in generating and sustaining failure. Development agencies, both multilateral and bilateral, have strong proclivities toward promoting isomorphic mimicry—for example, encouraging governments to adopt the right policies and organization charts and to pursue “best practice” reforms—without actually creating the conditions in which true novelty can emerge, be evaluated, and be scaled. It is much more attractive for donors to measure their success as either inputs provided, training sessions held, or reforms undertaken and in compliance with project implementation rules; all of these are laudable activities that can be readily justified and attractively presented at year’s end, yet they can lead to zero actual improvement in a system’s demonstrated performance.

The logic of the broader structures of the international aid architecture and the core incentives faced by the staffs of the major development organizations largely conspire against local innovation and context-specific engagement. This system instead rewards those who manage large portfolios with minimal fuss (actual accomplishment of objectives being a second-order consideration), resists rigorous evaluation (since such an exercise may empirically document outright failure, which cannot be ignored), and focuses primarily on measuring clear material inputs (as opposed to performance outcomes). Moreover, the more difficult the country context and the more ambiguous the appropriate policy response, the stronger the incentive to legitimize one’s actions—to clients, colleagues, and superiors—by deferring to

what others deem to be best practices and to assess one's performance in accordance with measurable indicators, which again tend to be inputs (since, unlike outcomes, they can be controlled, managed, and predicted in relatively unproblematic ways). Given that virtually all developing country contexts are, almost by definition, complex and facing all manner of needs, the systemic incentive to identify proven solutions and universal toolkits is powerful; those who can provide them (or claim to provide them)—from microfinance and conditional cash transfers to malaria nets and property rights—are development's stars.

### How Can One Escape from Capability Traps?

Our core argument is that the politics and process of development interventions have fostered and exacerbated capability traps in many developing countries, where governments are being required to adopt best-practice reforms that ultimately cannot work and end up crowding out alternative ideas and initiatives that may have emerged from local agents. Capability traps close the space for novelty, establishing fixed best-practice agendas as the basis of evaluating developing countries and of granting organizations in these countries support and legitimacy if they comply with such agendas. In so doing, they have all but excluded local agents from the process of building their own states, implicitly undermining the value-creating ideas of local leaders and frontline workers. The upshot is unimplemented laws, unfunded agencies, and unused processes littering education sectors, public financial management regimes, and judiciaries across the globe. Governments adopting such reforms look better for a period—when laws are newly passed, for instance—but

ultimately they do not demonstrate a higher level of performance, as new laws are not put into practice.

Helping countries escape from capability traps involves pursuing development interventions based on a different set of principles. These interventions should:

- ❖ aim to solve particular problems in local contexts, as opposed to transplanting preconceived and packaged best practice solutions
- ❖ facilitate positive deviation, as opposed to designing projects and programs and then emphasizing that agents implement them exactly as designed
- ❖ involve active, ongoing, and experiential learning and the feedback of lessons into new solutions, as opposed to enduring long lag times in learning from ex-post “evaluation”
- ❖ engage broad sets of agents to ensure that reforms are viable and relevant—that is, politically acceptable and practically possible—as opposed to promoting the top-down diffusion of innovation.

We suggest that these four principles could be combined into a new approach to development and state-building, which we tentatively title Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA). Our aim beyond this article is to use PDIA methods in particular interventions, and to gather accounts of where they may already have been introduced, in order to learn from the grounded experiences of others and to adapt/update/refine PDIA accordingly. It is an ongoing process to which we actively encourage readers to contribute. **PRISM**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This article draws upon and summarizes two longer academic articles by the authors: Lant Pritchett, Michael Woolcock, and Matt Andrews, “Looking Like a State: Techniques of Persistent Failure in State Capability for Implementation,” *Journal of Development Studies* (forthcoming); and Matt Andrews, Lant Pritchett, and Michael Woolcock, “Escaping Capability Traps Through Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA),” World Institute for Development Economics Research Working Paper (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> In the sociological literature, this phenomenon is known as *isomorphic mimicry*, following Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, “The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields,” *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 2 (April 1983), 147–160.

<sup>4</sup> Matt Andrews, “The Good Governance Agenda: Beyond Indicators Without Theory,” *Oxford Development Studies* 36, no. 4 (December 2008), 379–407.

<sup>5</sup> Matt Andrews et al., “Mozambique’s PFM Reform Lessons,” mimeo, World Bank Africa Region, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> This contrast is merely illustrative; for present purposes (and as we qualify in more detail below), we are not brazenly claiming that all development systems would work better if only they adopted market principles. The point is that system characteristics of all kinds shape the actions of organizations and agents.

<sup>7</sup> See Peter Evans, “Development as Institutional Change: The Pitfalls of Monocropping and the Potentials of Deliberation,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2004), 30–52. Also relevant here is the classic work of James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Lant Pritchett and Michael Woolcock, “Solutions When the Solution Is the Problem: Arraying the Disarray in Development,” *World Development* 32, no. 2 (2004), 191–212.

<sup>9</sup> How such a system emerged historically is crucial to understanding whether and how it can be adopted elsewhere. Put differently, even if the Dutch education system produced the highest achieving students in the world, it is far from clear that Chad and Uruguay could emulate it by importing its constituent *organizational structures*. In saying this, we also recognize that the capability requirements of even a highly functional system are likely to change over time and across sectors (that is, a state may have capability requirements that are adequate for one challenge but inadequate for another). These more detailed points will be explored in subsequent work.

<sup>10</sup> Andrews et al.

<sup>11</sup> The case of modern computing is ably discussed in Clayton M. Christensen, *The Innovator’s Dilemma: The Revolutionary Book That Will Change the Way You Do Business* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Moreover, as the development saying goes, “A project that gives a man a fish feeds him for a day, but a project to teach a man to fish lets you give your friend the technical assistance contract.”

Combat resupply mission in northern Kunar Valley supports Afghan National Police



ISAF

# Lessons from MoDA

## Continuing the Conversation on How to Advise Institution-building

BY NADIA GERSPACHER AND ADRIAN SHTUNI

Established in 2009, the Afghanistan Ministry of Defense Advisors (MoDA) program was based on a thorough needs assessment and extensive consultations with U.S., coalition, and Afghan stakeholders as well as possible support and service providers. The program initially recruited, trained, and deployed 17 senior advisors to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Training Mission–Afghanistan/Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (NTM-A/CSTC-A) mission. Most advisors were assigned to the Ministry of Defense (MoD), with a few assigned to the Ministry of Interior (MoI). The goal of the program is to help transform the key security ministries into more efficient, effective, and professional institutions, capable of inheriting

Dr. Nadia Gerspacher is Senior Program Officer in the Academy for International Conflict Management and Peacebuilding at the United States Institute of Peace. Adrian Shtuni is a Research Assistant at the United States Institute of Peace.

and executing the overall national security mission by 2014. By all accounts, the advisors, guided by many other similar capacity-building joint projects, have thus far effectively engaged their counterparts at MoD and MoI, developing rapport and productive professional relationships at a relatively early stage in their tours.

**an initial question that program managers must answer is where to house the advising mission within the host country**

In June 2010, the first MoDA team deployed on a 1-year assignment, renewable for an additional 12 months. About half the advisors opted to renew for the option year. Since 2010, MoDA has trained and deployed four additional cohorts of senior advisors for assignment in Afghanistan—nearly 100 all told—and all are experts in the proper functioning of institutions. Recently, Congress granted MoDA global authority for fiscal year 2013, so the program will soon begin deploying ministerial advisors to other requesting countries around the globe.

Now that MoDA has deployed almost 100 civilian advisors (most of whom are still in Afghanistan), it is time to begin formally assessing the program and incorporating lessons learned into the preparation and training program, recruitment, and other support for the advisors. This article offers initial lessons learned from the first phases of this historic and unique initiative in which civilians are building institutional capacity and helping demilitarize security institutions. The lessons presented in this article are the result of in-depth, individual, semistructured interviews by the authors with nine advisors who returned

and three who opted to remain in Afghanistan for another year.

The presentation of the lessons in the concluding section follows a categorization process that the authors believe would be useful to a wide variety of deploying agencies and mission commands. The categories include lessons on how the mission should be formulated, how it should be branded, and how advising efforts should be structured and integrated in the larger international intervention; lessons on the recruitment and selection of advisors; lessons on working with foreign counterparts in a reform environment; and lessons on preparing advisors for effective institution-building missions.

### **Integration in a Mission**

Selected senior civil advisors in the MoDA program are U.S. Federal employees with established careers in many components of the Department of Defense and extensive expertise in logistics, finance, personnel, communications, public works, public affairs, and intelligence. In the field, they report to NTM-A/CSTC-A.

In general, a ministerial advisory effort might be based either within an Embassy or within an international military mission. In Afghanistan, the choice was between an Embassy Country Team or NTM-A itself as an integral part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Advisors interviewed for this article singled out the issue of institutional placement as an important strategic decision to be made by the deploying agency. Thus, an initial question that program managers must answer is where to house the advising mission within the host country. The Country Team option makes obvious sense in a country with limited or no foreign military presence. Even in most countries with established



military-to-military structures, a ministerial advising program should most likely still be located within the Embassy while the working relationship between the United States and the partner country is established through the Embassy. The Embassy serves as a hub for information-sharing, and the use of established diplomatic channels can help the U.S. training and assistance mission succeed.

In a country such as Afghanistan, however, where the legitimacy of the mission and personal safety of the advisors are at stake, the military structure is the most sensible home for the mission. The chaos that reigned in post-2003 Afghanistan dictated that all advising efforts needed to support the military assistance mission. A good rule of thumb is that when the military stands up a tactical headquarters of 12 or more people, then the military structure is a good home for the training mission. According to the advisors interviewed, 12 begins to be a critical mass—or a mission team. In Afghanistan, an added benefit to locating the training mission under the military structure was that it facilitated access to the Afghan Ministry of Defense. This access was important because the advisors found that in order to be taken seriously by MoD officials, they needed to be formally introduced by U.S. military personnel.

Once in the field, advisors need to cooperate and coordinate with other mission participants to be effective at supporting reform activities. Advisors who have returned from Afghanistan have suggested that with the impending termination of the ISAF mission, assigning MoDA to the Country Team would allow the advisory project to continue beyond the planned military departure in 2014. If it remains under the auspices of NTM-A, it may not receive the attention it deserves. It could

even be subsumed by other military projects. MoDA veterans recommend utilizing NATO capacity for ministerial advising that lies in the French, German, and Italian missions because they understand how to operate in a parliamentary system. Thus, leveraging European support, especially regarding the MoI, tends to get significant support throughout the mission because of European familiarity with the government structure of Afghanistan.

Another salient point is to arm the advisors with what reforms are in place and which coalition partner is responsible for them. The biggest obstacle was the mismatch of reform efforts. For example, the Italians implemented an inquisitorial system of justice. The United States and Canada implemented an evidentiary-based system of policing. The corrections system itself was Islamic. These systems did not fit well together and ended up causing a great deal of confusion for the police-development mission.

### Working with Afghan Counterparts

A better understanding of existing dynamics and the context of operations would enable advisors to work more effectively with their local counterparts and help them manage expectations. When the Soviets left Afghanistan in 1989, they left behind a functioning if short-lived government, the institutional culture of which has survived in some ways.<sup>1</sup> That culture was based on the highly bureaucratic and centralized Soviet model in which decisionmaking, even for daily tasks, is concentrated at the highest levels of the hierarchy. According to returning advisors, so much is centralized in Afghanistan because of the prevalence of the Soviet mindset that leaders, even at the ministerial level, cannot make a decision until they are instructed to or authorized by higher political authorities. Otherwise they face reprimand.



U.S. Navy (Ernesto Hernandez Fonte)



Afghan border police fire antitank weapon during training in Kabul

Expectation management means remaining patient and understanding the limitations imposed by history, politics, and current realities. A solid understanding of the challenges and limitations facing advisors must inform an action plan that reflects the fact that neither they nor their counterparts operate in a vacuum. The plan must be simple, executable, and have genuine Afghan buy-in.

The first MoDA cohort was prepared to manage expectations as a result of extensive and effective predeployment training on that topic. Advisors must live by the rule that they should never promise anything. Rather, they must understand the existing power dynamics and incrementally introduce new ways of doing business. It is crucial for advisors to have first established sound professional relationships with their counterparts and to have shown that they have the interests of their principals in mind and seek to identify better processes and positive effects. The best medium for accomplishing this goal is direct, open, and candid brainstorming with counterparts. If this step is not taken, advisors run the risk of getting a “quasi” buy-in and even pushback. Advisors should refrain from overtly criticizing how counterparts currently do business. Such criticism creates walls that are slow in coming down and hinders future brainstorming, problem resolution, and learning.

MoDA veterans describe the benefit of employing “feasible” instead of “complex” methods to achieve realistic goals. Afghan counterparts will follow the advice they receive most of the time. For example, upon receiving suggestions for changes to the supply chain, most counterparts went with the advice and were willing to figure out the modalities on their own, succeeding in most cases. Afghans can get things done surprisingly quickly. In this sense, the right solution—keeping in mind the context,

situation, and capacities/capabilities technology—is the feasible solution. It is a mistake for a Western advisor to insist that an Afghan do things “the smart, quick, and right way” without consulting the local stakeholders on what they think is right for them, taking into account their capacities and preferences and overall feasibility. As duly emphasized in predeployment training, promoting local ownership is pivotal not only to successful advisory efforts but also to developing sustainable solutions. Despite the consistent difficulties that advisors have had in implementing this approach (due to operational pressures), in the long run the benefits of local ownership indisputably outweigh the benefits of achieving goals in record time but leaving the Afghans unengaged and passive.

The relationship between advisors and counterparts also benefits immensely from an advisor’s ability to instill a sense of vision. For example, when an Afghan two-star general is signing supply requests for the entire country, the advisor might delicately reassure him that although this job is important, the general could delegate some authority to a lower level in order for him to focus on more strategic matters and improve the overall service the ministry is able to provide to the population.

### **Trust-building**

Afghans and other host nation actors often think that foreign advisors have ulterior motives, so it takes much longer to build relationships than most Western advisors anticipate. The trust-building process requires persistence and patience. Some advisors theorize that the hospitality they are shown doubles as a way for their Afghan counterparts to keep an eye on them. Advisors should also be mindful that they may inherit a negative reputation based simply on their identity (for example, American,

Western, United Nations, NATO, or female) and should explicitly address this early with their counterparts. Advisors who take these assumptions seriously and acknowledge the negative connotations and dangers of foreign interventions are the ones the Afghans trust and will confide in when security deteriorates. Advisors who have a strong rapport with their counterparts are more likely to be told when something is afoot.

**the relationship between advisors and counterparts benefits immensely from an advisor’s ability to instill a sense of vision**

The patronage system also represents moral, ethical, and practical challenges to advisors. Many aspects of it make advisors uncomfortable and discouraged. Advisors need to understand that patronage systems exist in many developing countries, and the patronage system in Afghanistan is pervasive. This can be a stumbling block to trust-building. While it is important not to indulge and support the system, it is crucial to understand the personal connections of counterparts and stakeholders. Certainly, advisors should refrain from embracing this patronage system. A returned advisor remarked, “It’s not how we make decisions, and that should be made clear to the counterpart.” For example, advisors should refrain from doing what their counterparts ask if the requests only serve to reinforce the patronage system. Advisors should take the time to delicately explain why they cannot execute the requests. They should be specific about the adverse effects the requests would have on the decision-making process. Advisors should emphasize that their recommendations are not personal, but

deliberate and based on principle and that “no” does not mean “I don’t like you or who you are connected to.” “No” means they do not believe such action would benefit the Afghan people. It is important to immediately refute any suspicion that counterparts are receiving assistance or advice because of their family connections or other patronage-based considerations. The intent of the MoDA mission is in part to showcase the power of open and honest communication and meritocratic systems.

**civilians tend to be associated with their Embassies rather than with the ISAF training mission**

In many interviews, MoDA advisors mentioned the lasting influence of the Soviet mindset in Afghanistan. Senior officials at the Ministries of Defense and Interior have a Soviet bureaucratic mentality because they came of age during that period. That can make it difficult for advisors to convince Afghan leaders to delegate decisionmaking authority. This type of system offers many opportunities for corrupt practices. It is common, for example, that when a district receives supplies in excess of its needs, and does not have a storage warehouse, local officials will sell the material to the highest bidder and capture the revenue themselves. Advisors and senior officials should work together to introduce more efficient systems and to develop procedures in which there are controls over what is needed, requested, and delivered. It is important to remain optimistic and to believe that new systems *can* be created.

Finally, advisors should keep in mind that the success of their missions often hinges on building rapport, being good listeners, and demonstrating humility and empathy. Until

counterparts believe advisors have their best interests in mind, they are not going to fully cooperate. Once a relationship reaches the stage of mutual esteem and trust, the impact of an advisor’s effort is likely to be much more tangible and positive. According to some MoDA veterans, building these relations took effort and skill, but it was achievable because Afghans respect authority and power. Senior leaders enjoy more trust. However, regardless of how senior the foreign advisor is, trust takes a long time to build.

### **Tour Length**

Since MoDA is designed to forge long-term relationships that strengthen government institutions, the duration of the service period is critical. Truncated service periods hinder relationship-building. Though the current year-long deployments represent a significant improvement over earlier tours, which were typically 6 months or less, the general opinion among returnees is that longer tours would be more productive and conducive to achieving long-term, sustainable reform. As one advisor explained, the shorter tour duration means that every time a new advisor comes on board, the project goes backward. He compared it to running a relay race: one runner’s gains can be undermined by the next runner dropping the baton.

### **Civil-Military Cooperation**

In complex missions such as in Afghanistan, which is comprised of many agencies from the United States and NATO Allies, coordination and communication are difficult. Civilians tend to be associated with their Embassies rather than with the ISAF training mission, which is conducted mostly by military officers. According to some MoDA veterans, the advantage of having civilian personnel

deployed to advise Afghan officials in the Ministries of Defense and Interior rests in the fundamental differences between military and civilian engagement practices. Military officers manage violence and are less trained to advise civilian leadership. Successful institution-building requires advanced bureaucratic skills—for example, developing policy, logistics, and transport. While military officers are good at training troops, building institutions is a more suitable task for career civilians or military personnel with extensive experience in civilian-led institutions. Moreover, most U.S. military personnel are significantly younger than defense civilian personnel, as well as their Afghan counterparts, which has been known to cause resentment and slow progress.

Once deployed, advisors naturally gravitate toward the type of work they know best. However, sometimes the skill sets they offer are not the skills their Afghan counterparts need. When this occurs, the advisor must quickly alert the head advisor, command, or Country Team so the mismatch can be remedied. In the past, U.S. Navy pilots have been assigned as supply advisors and warehouse operators. This is not their area of expertise. When such a mismatch is identified, everyone involved should be willing to make a change for the sake of the mission. A returned MoDA advisor recounted the experience of a senior advisor—a U.S. Air Force colonel—who was assigned to logistics at the MoD. She was an expert in transportation. Because logistics was not her expertise, she spent a great deal of time sitting in the general's office watching him sign forms. A similar mismatch occurred when a two-star general who did not specialize in human resources was assigned to the chief of personnel. He was profoundly disengaged from the work and did not do any

advising. These examples serve as reminders of the time and talent that are squandered when advanced planning or timely fixes do not occur.

Sometimes there are conflicts between the military structure in the host nation and the cultural norms of the advising country. In Afghanistan, for example, some MoD officials balk at the idea of working with a woman. It is especially difficult for them to accept strategic advice from one. Several advisors recounted that officials told them they viewed working with a woman as subquality assistance. The religiousness of the host nation person and his position within the institution affect his willingness to take advice from female experts. In some cases, advisors have observed that female advisors benefit from a relative gender “blindness” in contrast to local women.

In some cases, the coalition military does not know how to incorporate civilians into the mission, so they take them along without defining their roles and responsibilities. Getting civilian experts into a country involves recruitment, training, and deployment, all of which take time. If a position is especially important, a military advisor will often fill the slot. Thus, when the MoDA arrives, he will be placed elsewhere so as not to disrupt the progress that the military advisor is making with his counterpart. This has resulted in civilian advisors working as note-takers and staff assistants. This is inappropriate and a misuse of talents and skills. Equally unsatisfactorily, sometimes civilians are regarded as contractors by the U.S. military; hence they are not respected as strategic advisors. Advisors must speak up and demonstrate that they are a resource that serves the project well. Finally, military personnel occasionally overrely on the advisor's contacts and professional network in Washington, but the civilian

advisor is not a liaison officer and should refrain from acting like one.

Despite the potential for problems and misunderstandings, it is worthwhile for military personnel and civilians to work together on advisory teams. Military personnel provide instant credibility to the host nation's military and police forces, and civilians are visible reminders of the importance of civilian control over the armed forces. American civilians must remember that this may be a challenging concept and perhaps even a paradigm shift for the host nation.

**the most competent advisors can work with many local actors at multiple levels, not just with assigned counterparts**

### **Profile of an Effective Advisor**

Effective advisors share basic characteristics. They are resourceful. They are good communicators. They are able to persuade, educate, inspire, and guide their counterparts toward change. They are open to alternate approaches and creative solutions. Generally, though not always, they are comfortable engaging all types of people, and their focus and commitment to the work at hand is contagious. People skills—the ability to work closely with counterparts—are crucial. One returned advisor mentioned that he came from an American Southern storytelling tradition, which helped him relate to his Afghan counterpart, who also grew up in a storytelling culture. This advisor was personable and always happy to participate in non-professional gatherings such as leisurely meals with local officials. Storytelling was a mutually enjoyable pastime that fostered rapport, built trust, and laid a foundation for the specific work

the advisor was deployed to do. Advisors who fear the environment, their principals, or their colleagues typically do poorly in an advisory capacity. One advisor, for example, upon learning that his counterpart carried a knife, refused to walk in front of him. This fear and obvious lack of trust prevented a solid working relationship from materializing.

Another important attribute for an advisor is the ability to engage staff members who are either a few levels below or above their counterparts. This is not an easy skill to master when one is communicating through an interpreter, especially in a highly hierarchical system. The most competent advisors are the ones who can work with many local actors at multiple levels, not just with assigned counterparts. Advisors with this skill are sought out, and being sought out increases one's influence and impact on ministerial reform.

Advisors must exhibit flexibility and adaptability to sudden and drastic changes in tasks, priorities, and the security environment. These attributes often follow from an extensive and diverse professional background. Indeed, an advisor who has held a variety of posts back home is generally more comfortable navigating opaque bureaucracies and keeping various stakeholders happy and informed. Flexible and adaptable advisors have strong problem-solving skills and a greater degree of maturity than their less experienced peers. As a result, the ideas put forth by an advisor are less likely to have unintended consequences on other parts of the system. In addition, an effective advisor must be tactful and able to turn a hostile situation into one in which all parties come out with a degree of satisfaction. While it may not be a win-win outcome, it should allow everyone to move forward without acrimony or losing face. Again, those professionals who have made a

career in only one department may have a more difficult time adapting to vastly different systems and institutions and generally be less attuned to the subtle needs of the many local people with whom they come in contact.

Effective advisors constantly strive to put themselves in the shoes of their counterparts—that is, they practice empathy. Advisors are effective when they make their counterparts' lives easier, make processes more effective, and make corruption and patronage less prevalent. But advisors must always remember that the desire to succeed needs to come from the counterparts. Advisors cannot will success. What they can do is coach counterparts on what questions they should be asking and what results they should be expecting from changes introduced into particular systems. Indeed, advisors and counterparts can work together to develop metrics that measure whether the systems are working and improving. Subsequently, counterparts can lead evaluations of the programs or systems and compare them to baseline assessments.

In addition to technical expertise, advisors must have soft skills such as patience, compassion, and the ability to be team players, catalyze innovative thinking, and encourage counterparts to communicate effectively both vertically and horizontally within the bureaucracies. These attributes are crucial. If advisors enter partnerships and immediately discount the existing procedures, or suggest that the officials and staff lack significant competencies, the counterparts will likely respond by closing channels and invoking “*Inshallah*” (the will of God) dismissively. Advisors should refrain from patronizing counterparts. The parent-child relationship is not an appropriate basis for this relationship; the model is rather a peer-to-peer relationship between experienced professionals.

The complex and delicate nature of the tasks and the diverse and challenging operational environments in which they work require advisors to demonstrate patience, respect, humility, and empathy in their daily interactions with local partners and the host community. That is why the selection process is critical and should include screening mechanisms that identify candidates with demonstrated core competencies such as flexibility, integrity, relationship-building, strategic alignment, organizational know-how, and communication skills. Additionally, because cultural curiosity is desirable, it is important to identify advisors who appreciate immersion into host cultures and are eager to interact with local populations. Finally, because of the hardship associated with being deployed in a dangerous and challenging environment such as Afghanistan, finding people with cultural and physical adaptation skills (who often are more comfortable in such environments) is essential.

Predeployment training is critical because it provides even experienced professionals with the necessary tools, approaches, and skills to become effective mentors specifically in Afghanistan (in the case of MoDA thus far). It teaches them about the traditions, history, and political dynamics of the country. It also prepares them to be adaptable, responsible, and informed decisionmakers. In the case of the MoDA program, the 7-week training program includes professional advisor training, cultural awareness instruction, country familiarization, language instruction, senior-level consultations and briefings, and an evaluated Capstone Exercise.<sup>2</sup> Predeployment training involves both small group work and larger plenary sessions where the results of the small group discussions are shared.

All MoDA program advisors are given in-depth instruction on both the Ministry of



Defense and Ministry of Interior. This training is included because advisors may find themselves moving between the two ministries during their tours, or perhaps advising the same departments in each ministry. For example, one advisor may split his time working on gender mainstreaming issues at both the MoD and MoI. This is a challenging assignment for the advisor but helps standardize programming and encourages interaction between MoD and MoI on mutually relevant issues.

**in addition to their role as language facilitators, interpreters are cultural brokers critical to the success of the mission**

Working with interpreters is surprisingly difficult—it is a skill in and of itself. Thus, how to work effectively with interpreters is an important element in predeployment training and preparation. It is not possible for an MoDA program advisor to become proficient in the host nation's local language in 7 weeks of predeployment training. Reliance on a skilled interpreter is necessary. In addition to their role as language facilitators, interpreters are cultural brokers critical to the success of the mission. In Afghanistan, working with interpreters is especially arduous for two reasons. First, the inherent tensions and elevated security risks associated with a postconflict environment make this work difficult. Second, in a country with an estimated literacy rate of less than 30 percent, it is difficult to find qualified and reliable interpreters. Based on accounts by most returned MoDAs, the majority of the interpreters who support the ministerial advising effort lack the educational background or breadth of knowledge to provide interpretation services at

a highly expert or professional standard. Many interpreters have limited knowledge of English and provide literal translation that is far from accurate because of their poor understanding of the context, the professional content, or the nuances of the technical vernacular.

One way to mitigate communication problems is for advisors to meet with their interpreters in advance to set the agenda and review goals for upcoming meetings. Afghanistan has a complex, highly context-driven and personalized culture in which personality and opinions are never far from the surface. Several MoDAs have noted that Afghan interpreters sometimes appear conflicted during meetings, wanting to please both their U.S. employers and their Afghan compatriots. This ambivalence can result in inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise redacted translations. To increase accuracy, advisors must trust their interpreters and continually share information and ideas with them. Advisors must see their interpreters as their closest partners. Without a trust-based relationship with interpreters, it is almost impossible to create a trust-based relationship with ministerial counterparts.

### Recommendations

Structure and Integration into the Larger International Intervention:

- ❖ The advising mission must be strategically placed to maximize access to local officials, in some cases in the Embassy and in others within the international mission.
- ❖ Advisors must coordinate with various foreign governments, international organizations, and development organizations. It is a complex web of agencies and programs, but failure to coordinate limits effectiveness.



- ❖ Civilian advisors need to find ways to become expert resources even in large advisor teams, especially if their skills and talents are being underutilized.

Recruitment and Selection of Advisors:

- ❖ Selected advisors must be optimistic and believe that change is possible. Ideally, they should be able to articulate a vision for the ministry to which they are assigned.
- ❖ Effective advisors communicate, persuade, and educate. Ultimately, effective advisors inspire their counterparts to consider new and different solutions to existing problems.

Working with Foreign Counterparts:

- ❖ Advisors need to get buy-in from Afghan officials during every step of the advising process, or their proposals will not be undertaken and maintained.
- ❖ Advisors should look for the simplest feasible solutions to problems.
- ❖ Working effectively with interpreters is the first step toward working well with counterparts.

Preparing Advisors for the Mission:

- ❖ Deploying agencies must think about the best way to teach the local language. It is important to master commonly used key phrases and administrative terms. Language should be considered a rapport-building tool. Therefore, the focus should be on teaching language and cultural norms together instead of focusing on fluency, which is an unattainable goal in most instances. Advisors should continue language training during deployment as a way to increase effectiveness.
- ❖ Advisors find themselves interacting and coordinating with many international actors and agencies every day. Civilian advisors should learn about the military structure and how to work inside an operational command. Predeployment training should help advisors learn more about the resources that each component of the coalition brings to the table, thus increasing unity of effort through better coordination.
- ❖ Ministerial/strategic advisors should be taught how to interact with high-level officials. Top officials are quite sophisticated and adept at working with foreigners, unlike local tribesmen, who have generally had less exposure to other cultures. Rather than learning how to engage local mullahs and village elders, it would be more helpful to understand how to interact with skeptical ministry officials.

## Conclusion

Advising is a vehicle for capacity-building, and capacity-building is the key to reforming government institutions—that is, to making them capable of effectively providing useful and expected services equitably and systematically to the population. All government agencies and international organizations involved in foreign assistance are deploying advisors to strengthen national and local institutions. Some invest heavily in selection and recruitment only; others combine selection and

recruitment with a robust preparation/training program before deployment, as does the MoDA program. Still others pull advisors from mission participants already in-country when a specific need is identified, thus cannibalizing other operations in an ad hoc manner. Some outsource the training of foreign officials to private companies. The approaches to deploying advisors vary according to the circumstances faced by each deploying agency or organization.

All in all, the advising mission is a key asset in the foreign assistance toolbox, but it must be configured so it fosters capacity-building activities, enabling advisors to share ideas and help implement jointly developed plans with their foreign counterparts. First and foremost, advisory missions must be formulated around the mantra “Be part of the process—don’t try to be the solution.” This is a key rule of engagement in capacity-building, and no reform project will be sustainable without it. The expertise that advisors bring to the capacity-building mission is vital, but it is the sharing and transference of knowledge that are the most precious roles the international community can play in supporting sustainable development. The mission should be undertaken carefully and build on lessons learned as they become available.

This article highlights the lessons learned of MoDA, an extremely ambitious program. Nevertheless, the lessons are applicable to any advising mission in any country. Indeed, any advising mission requires an adequate mission structure, whether embedded in an Embassy Country Team or in an international military mission. The civilian-military coordination and collaboration that were discovered to be so crucial to the overall advising effort apply to any mission. The training of advisors must focus on preparing these professionals with substantial experience and substantive expertise, ultimately transforming them into capacity-builders. **PRISM**

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lester W. Grau, “Breaking Contact Without Leaving Chaos: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 20, no. 2 (June 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Additional information about the MoDA program, including the Capstone Exercise held in Indiana, is available at <[www.defense.gov/home/features/2011/0211\\_moda/](http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2011/0211_moda/)>.

# Recognizing Systems in Afghanistan

## Lessons Learned and New Approaches to Operational Assessments

BY WILLIAM P. UPSHUR, JONATHAN W. ROGINSKI, AND DAVID J. KILCULLEN

Until it was overhauled in 2011, the assessments process in Afghanistan's Regional Command South was mired in 240 metrics and indicators—some of which were uncollectable while others were entirely irrelevant. It lacked focus, failed to define the problem, and was divorced from decisionmaking cycles. That is to say, it was representative of how operational assessments are usually conducted. There was a general understanding that measuring the conflict environment was vital to the mission and to operational success. But what that was supposed to look like and how it was supposed to be accomplished were never articulated. What resulted was a frenetic approach that tried to measure the universe—attempting to analyze everything and accomplishing little.

The years 2009 and 2010 brought a sense that the soon-to-be decade-long war in South Asia needed a new and better defined focus. The campaign in Afghanistan had evolved to a universal, all-encompassing mission, a set of tasks for which the term *mission creep* is euphemistic. These tasks included counterinsurgency with all its associated complexities, counterterrorism, stability operations, developing rural and urban economies, improving governance, countering corruption, improving the rule of law, promoting female empowerment, building government institutions as well as Afghan military and police organizations, and countering the growth and

William P. Upshur is a Senior Associate with Caerus Associates, LLC. Major Jonathan W. Roginski, USA, is an Operations Research and Systems Analyst who served as Deputy Chief of the Afghanistan Assessments Group of 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division during its deployment to Regional Command South. Dr. David J. Kilcullen is Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Caerus Associates, LLC.

movement of narcotics—to name but a few. In Afghanistan, there is nothing we were not doing because everything could be justified as necessary to accomplish what was in reality a vague notion of success. There can be little wonder that operational assessments processes reflected the ambiguity of the mission—it is hard for any metrics system to be more precise than the goals it is designed to measure progress against.

Back in Washington, graduate schools, think tanks, and policy circles had been consumed by the debate about how to apply new focus—whether to shift U.S. presence in Afghanistan to a light footprint and focus on counterterrorism operations, or surge forces forward to replicate what was by then starting to be seen as victory in Iraq. In December 2009, the United States decided to surge its troops by 30,000, bringing the total to 100,000—with many of those troops headed for the south of Afghanistan. For the first time in the nearly decade-long conflict, the President directed that the United States would begin its drawdown in July 2011.

**it is hard for any metrics system to be more precise than the goals it is designed to measure progress against**

After the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Lisbon Conference agreed on a coalition withdrawal date of 2014, the headquarters element of 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division deployed to Kandahar Province to take command of international forces in Regional Command South. Kandahar and its environs were, and continue to be, some of the most violent territory in the country.

The war had now acquired a new focus and urgency. The United States had pegged

itself to a timeline, even in an environment as violent as southern Afghanistan. Transitioning security responsibility to Afghans became an overarching imperative.

Despite the widespread intellectual understanding of such realities, bureaucracies are ships that do not easily turn course. Organizations (and individuals) at war are fixated on what they know. Like mountain climbers halfway up a difficult rock face, people in war zones respond negatively to new and untried ideas, preferring for safety's sake to stick to what they know. Missions, projects, and endeavors develop staunch political and emotional constituencies. Sunk costs are difficult to rationalize when the ground becomes hallowed by blood already shed.

These dynamics play out on the battlefield as much as in the operational and strategic commands that develop campaign plans and then seek to measure progress in an intensely complex environment. Civilian agencies and nongovernmental organizations are subject to the same conditions.

### **Theoretical and Practical Problems of Assessments**

Within this context, the Assessments Group of 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, based in Kandahar, engaged throughout its tour in a constant struggle to make sense of the environment, understand changes in it, and communicate judgments about it, clearly and usefully, to the division's command group under Major General James Terry, USA.

The division had leveraged a wide array of expertise in an attempt to synthesize the nuance and complexity of the environment. A stroll around the headquarters (like any operational headquarters in Afghanistan sometimes even down to brigade level) would

find anthropologists, mathematicians, political scientists, area specialists, and a variety of academic experts and analysts gathering, interpreting, and publishing information about the battlespace. This was, of course, in addition to the vast number of military and civilian intelligence personnel deployed throughout the theater at all levels and the vast array of technical collection and analytical means at their disposal.

Within the broader analysis effort, the operational assessments cell was charged with synthesizing, analyzing, and interpreting information and presenting conclusions about the state of operations in a manner that could aid the commander's understanding and decisionmaking. The cell was also called upon to give the commander evidentiary ammunition justifying his decisions to higher headquarters and to policymakers miles away.

There were other teams in the headquarters whose analysis was also relevant to the decision cycle, but operational assessment was the organizational mechanism by which the division monitored the progress of its plans, evaluated their execution, and recommended required changes. As such, the operational assessments cell and its process represented a vital clearinghouse for information that described the counterinsurgency environment. Its task was to establish itself as a set of information receptors attuned to feedback that would allow 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division to understand how its actions affected its environment, and vice versa.

***Critiques of the Assessments Process.*** The difficulty in understanding this environment, and linking that understanding to operational plans, have been justly scrutinized. Indeed, the operational assessments process has been much written

about, and much maligned over recent years—with good reason.

One persistent criticism is that operational assessments teams have overreached in the pursuit of perfection. Some have tried to measure the universe, attempting to aggregate all the disparate information in the battlespace. Others, at the other end of the spectrum, have thrown up their hands and accepted the constraints of statistical reporting, merely counting events rather than interpreting them. Another criticism is that assessments often proceed from flawed assumptions with little real-world evidence. The varied cast of agencies performing assessments can at once be criticized for being too complex in their methodology and too simplistic in their analysis. This has resulted in understandable disenchantment with the assessments process.<sup>1</sup>

**one persistent criticism is that operational assessments teams have overreached in the pursuit of perfection**

Some analytical products have also been criticized as “coloring book assessments” that hamper understanding of the nuanced counterinsurgency environment. They use a familiar grey-red-orange-yellow-green rating scale to create operational planning maps, color-coding areas from very unstable to very stable. Critics correctly argue that this does not give sufficient information for commanders to make operational decisions and that it is difficult to understand what, if any, analytic processes or data are behind the colors. Others have suggested that some field commanders have developed an unhealthy obsession with changing the color of boxes (colloquially known as “shade-shifting”), rather than looking beyond the five-level color scale to the complexity it

seeks to represent. Yet commanders can only work with the tools their assessment teams offer them. If indeed the role of campaign analysis is to enable better decisionmaking, then it behooves analysts to develop useful and informative tools.

Perhaps in reaction to these criticisms, and perhaps because of the quantitative and technical education of the Operations Research and Systems Analysis branch—the designation for officers who generally lead operational assessments—there has been a great infusion of science, or at least a façade of quantitative rigor, into assessments. Unfortunately, this often culminates in processes built on junk arithmetic and junk logic.

**Precision versus Insight.** Part of this stems from the experience of the past decade, in which the United States and its allies have conducted an expeditionary counterinsurgency. Expeditionary counterinsurgents, like all expeditionary organizations, bring foreign perspectives to the environments in which they operate. Incidents in both Iraq and Afghanistan contrast the institutional preference for rigor that seems to be inherent in expeditionary force assessments with the qualitative and impressionistic assessments of host nation partners. This is no doubt a matter of perspective. It is also an indicator of understanding—the outsider does not have the emic context and shared memory necessary to make sense of the environment in ways that are meaningful to local partners, while local partners often lack the etic language required to convince an external ally of their perspective.

Expeditionary organizations must also answer to homeland constituencies. The axiom that “some numbers beat no numbers every time” plays out in reports to the U.S. legislative

and executive branches. Consumers demand precise analysis in order to justify the ongoing expenditure of blood and treasure and to show that operations are having the intended effects. As one recent study of intelligence in expeditionary counterinsurgency points out:

*commanders on the ground have to justify their actions and judgments to decision makers who may be thousands of miles away and thoroughly out of touch, with little “fingertip feel” for the environment—making quantifiable data a key commodity in the tricky process of handling distant superiors’ interventions, and convincing home governments to support on-scene commanders’ judgments. Intelligence staffs are therefore pushed to find quantifiable, verifiable, and replicable indicators to support assessments, as ammunition in the discussion with higher headquarters. This is especially so in cultures like that of Western (especially US) intelligence communities, which already place significant weight on numerical data, even if [those] numbers are often used to express largely qualitative judgments.<sup>2</sup>*

Some legislators and bureaucrats are likely befuddled by the military’s reliance on quantitative reporting, believing that it lacks context. Others, more disposed to loosen funds and resources, may find such information comforting and supportive. Often this results in perfunctorily quantitative analysis and meaningless numeration. When a commander asks for an operational assessments update, he will hear that the “security rating in Kandahar Province is 3.24.” To the uninitiated, this might seem impressively scientific until it is unpacked to expose the lack of precision beneath the spurious appearance of rigor.

***Drowning in Data.*** This is not to say that there is insufficient information behind such seemingly precise ratings. In fact, the opposite is often the problem: many assessments cells endeavor to collect and report everything that is important to everyone at all times. As the operational clearinghouses for all of the information that innumerable stakeholders publish or expect to see analyzed, assessments cells are frequently guilty of subjecting commanders to information overload. Analysts are eager to highlight the vast data behind their assessments but are often oblivious to the fact that much of it adds no useful context. It is common to see operational assessments models with hundreds of metrics processed through complex formulae.

In the development of assessments models—those quantitative, *Excel*-powered, esoteric machines that spit out security ratings of 3.24—this overuse of information is referred to as “metric bloat.” It is in the pursuit of perfect analytical precision that models become bloated—an attempt to include every possible piece of available data that might have even the tiniest effect on the assessment, without a clear conceptual model that allows analysts to prioritize important factors.

There are negative returns on the investment of adding minutiae to an assessments model. Detail may allow analysts to repose more comfortably on their enormous mounds of information—the sheer quantity of which should preempt any questions as to the veracity or accuracy of their conclusions—but it makes the process slow and unwieldy, diminishes the signal-to-noise ratio for analysts, and far exceeds what decisionmakers find useful. It also leaves gaping holes where data cannot be collected, which are easily hidden behind 3.24.

Even in gathering and analyzing all the data within reach, assessments cells generally put too little energy into information design. Operational assessments are usually presented on a linear scale with a marker to represent progression from left to right, or from “very bad” to “very good.” Yet with near universal agreement on the complexity of counterinsurgency, and conflict environments in general, it would be difficult to find anyone who thinks that linear visualizations actually describe changes in the environment in an operationally useful way.

**analysts are eager to highlight the vast data behind their assessments but are often oblivious to the fact that much of it adds no useful context**

All this has resulted in operational assessments being sidelined in many commanders’ decision cycles. This is hardly surprising. What is described above is spurious decimal grading on a visual scale divorced from meaningful context, emerging from technical, esoteric, even occult quantitative processes understood by very few staff officers. At its worst, it represents an attempt to create an appearance of rigor through the use of quantitative language to express subjective judgment—an attempt that is easily seen through, undermining the credibility of those who engage in it.

Even so, and allowing for all of the criticisms levied against assessments—especially those from observers with relevant operational experience—these critiques disregard some aspects of operational decisionmaking. Assuming they contain rigorous analysis, colored maps (for example, so-called heat maps)



depicting area stability are more useful than overly calibrated, seemingly scientific models. The instincts that lead to metric bloat and information overload cloud the fundamental job of assessments: to give the commander sufficient and sufficiently clear information to decide the effective allocation of resources, priorities, timing, and objectives.

There are also important constraints imposed by the reality of counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, which also probably describe many conflict and postconflict environments. Afghanistan is an information-rich but data-poor environment. Data that do exist are generally of poor quality. Infuriating inconsistency is the norm; impressions, atmospherics,

**field research methods always impose an observer effect, where the act of collecting information changes the population's perception**

rumors, and gut feelings abound. Most information comes in the form of anecdote. All this can be useful, and commanders will demand that it be taken into account, but it must be considered in a structured and self-aware way lest it distort decisionmaking.

The social sciences can enable rigorous analysis of qualitative data, but social science methods are hampered by the special circumstances of conflict environments. Field research in a war zone is dangerous to all involved. Attempts to leverage such expertise in Iraq and Afghanistan have had mixed results. Programs such as the U.S. Army's Human Terrain System have tried to deploy anthropological and area studies experts in the battlespace at the tactical and operational levels, but acquiring personnel with the proper

background has proven difficult. Even with the proper personnel, achieving sufficient unfettered interaction with the population and generating meaningful insights from that interaction have proven still more so. Though some commanders find such programs useful, overall results have been far less than hoped.

Field research methods always impose an observer effect, where the act of collecting information changes the population's perception. This dynamic is even more pronounced in the counterinsurgency environment, where researchers are not impartial but rather armed actors in a conflict; thus, there is a "combatant observer effect." The interviewer's obvious association with a combatant organization affects the openness and honesty of respondents, as does the power disparity between a member of an occupying military force and an unarmed local population.

To get beyond these limitations, remotely observable indicators are needed—data that can be collected without changing popular perceptions. In addition, expeditionary organizations have to learn how to make much more effective use of vetted, qualified indigenous researchers.

Thus not all assessments can come from pure, scientific rigor—though the social sciences can usefully inform the process. Analysts must know what is scientifically possible, operationally useful, and timely in the context of the commander's decision cycle.

But with so much analytical noise floating about the headquarters, and so many theoretical and practical problems associated with the assessments process, how would it be possible to parse out what is truly important and stave off metric bloat? If information was inherently unstructured and potentially unknowable, how could the assessments team build a usable and useful model?

### Theoretically Grounded Assessment

Answering this question begins with the understanding that environments—especially conflict environments—have personalities. Effective plans must interact with those personalities if they are to have any chance of achieving their objectives.

Determining how 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division’s plan was interacting with the environment of southern Afghanistan in 2010 required a general theory—a structured description of how things worked—in order to understand changes in the environment against a meaningful understanding of “normal” background conditions. This theory must be wholly divorced from the strategic theory of victory and from the current coalition operational plan. This general theory of the environment and an understanding of how the environment works—something referred to in other contexts as “territorial logic” or “systems logic”—would become a framework for understanding the logic of the environment and for mapping its dynamic systems, feedback loops, and causal links. By contrast, the campaign plan was a framework for how military operations will achieve specific goals. The former was a map, the latter a flight plan.

Beginning with a period of field observation and qualitative study, looking at a variety of districts and seeking to understand their logic at first hand, the assessments cell eventually posited a general theory. The data at hand suggested that there were dynamic cycles of stability in the provinces for which 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division was responsible.

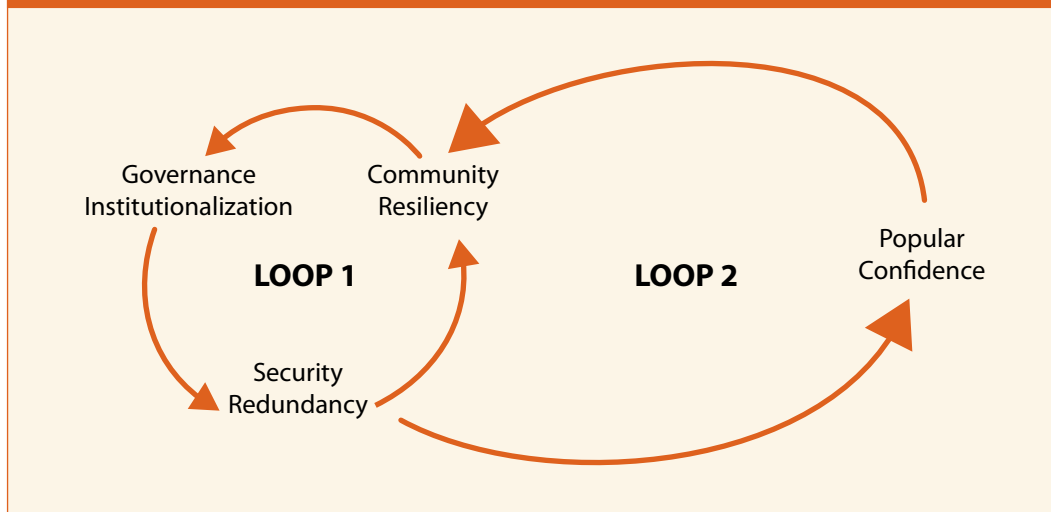
These “double-loop” stability cycles were driven by the general public’s perception of security, degree of government institutionalization (or lack thereof), popular confidence, willingness to invest in noninsurgent

institutions, and community resiliency. Community resiliency described the ability of a given community to absorb shocks and the speed with which it returned to a steady state (albeit, perhaps, at a different level of violence than before). A positive catalyst, such as a strong-willed or charismatic political leader or an improvement in security, could lead to greater popular investment in non-insurgent institutions, prompting a virtuous cycle of improved stability and then improved resilience as people’s expectations about the future changed.

**The Double-loop Stability Model.** In common with many field analyses—including, interestingly, the World Bank’s *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development*—the assessments cell found evidence for a mutually reinforcing cyclical effect among improvements in confidence on the one hand, and improvements in local security, governance institutionalization, and community resiliency on the other (see figure 1).<sup>3</sup> A negative impetus could of course function in the opposite direction, prompting a vicious cycle of declining security.

This model of the environment, like all models, is a greatly simplified description of a complex and nuanced real-world dynamic system. Furthermore, it is important to note that these dynamics are, at least in theory, specific to a particular place and time. A theory that worked in southern Afghanistan in 2011 cannot necessarily be applied to another theater or elsewhere in Afghanistan. It is highly likely the theory that held in southern Afghanistan in 2011 will no longer hold there in 2015. Any theory needs constant reevaluation as ongoing observation and new information change the general understanding of the theater of operations.

Figure 1. Local Double-loop Stability Model



Still, this theory of the environment provided a sufficient basis to guide the development of a set of metrics against which the team was able to assess stability. Using the theory outlined above, operational assessments cells developed a concise list of 11 metrics described by 18 indicators—a far cry from the previous set of 84 metrics, or the 240 metrics used before that. These metrics, described in table 1, represented a dramatic reduction in the analytical burden on the headquarters and reduced the reporting burden for 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division units. Framing the assessment within the context of the real-time operational environment (rather than collecting information against a generic, universal set of indicators as had been previously done) allowed the team to develop a focused assessment process that was at once simpler and more useful.

This approach did not represent an exhaustive list of every piece of information that was important in the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division battlespace at this time—indeed, it was expressly designed not to. Metrics that are usefully able to describe the environment are a small subset of measurable descriptors. Thus, to be useful, the stability model had to be both a structured and selective description of the environment. It focused on only those particular features that were assessed as important, during that specific time and in that place.

This process of systematic and targeted simplification was, of course, a qualitative one, and this provided the qualitative input needed to imbue subsequent quantitative analysis with meaning. Without the qualitative analysis involved in the triage process of selecting metrics, a purely quantitative analysis would have faced all the problems of rigor without the meaning described earlier. This assessments process thus involved an inductive, qualitative phase in which the team sought to make sense of the environment, and a deductive, quantitative phase in which the indicators (qualitatively designed based on field work) were deductively analyzed.

Table 1. Assessment Metrics and Indicators in Southern Afghanistan 2011

Metrics	Indicators
Resiliency of government institutions	Length of tenure and quality of government officials Degree of government penetration Budgetary execution
Survivability of government officials and community leaders	Length of time local officials and community elders survive in office
Public confidence in government legitimacy and effectiveness	Popular perception of government Popular use of district center
Predictability and acceptability of corruption	Popular perception of corruption
Strength of Shura and councils	Shura and council assessment
Civilian freedom of movement	Freedom of movement assessment
Function and effectiveness of rule of law	Reliability and accessibility of rule of law Popular perception of rule of law
Degradation of the insurgency	Effectiveness of the insurgency Capacity of the insurgency Will of the insurgency
Function and effectiveness of government security institutions	Popular perception of government security forces and institutions Afghan National Security Forces ability to defeat the insurgency
Functioning community security	Popular perception of local security
Resilience of subsistence economy	Economy assessment

This approach also facilitated assessments under the conditions of remote observation often imposed by violent conflict.<sup>4</sup>

Conceivably, identifying the important nodes of a dynamic system and developing pertinent metrics would allow assessments to be conducted on almost any program designed to interact with that environment. In the case of counterinsurgency operations in southern Afghanistan, the team grouped each metric with others in order to describe the division's progress or regress against campaign objectives.

Yet as the forgoing criticisms of operational assessments show, that is not the difficult task. The greater problem is how to incorporate intransigently unscientific information into a rigorous model

to give commanders an accurate assessment and thus enable more informed decisions.

### Enabling Better Decisions

To solve this problem, the team applied the widely used method of rating definition levels (RDLs), but with greater granularity than usual. RDLs are the tool with which operational assessments cells—especially in Afghanistan—create their grey-red-orange-yellow-green colored maps. An RDL is essentially a 1–5 Likert scale wherein each level is given a sufficiently specific definition so there can be little disagreement about what level may be assigned to a given area for a given line of operation. Until recently in Afghanistan, this method has been applied only to broadly defined indicators for security, governance, and development.

**the assessments team developed definitions by seeking input from representatives from all around the division**

In this case, the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division assessments team, with representation from across the military and civilian staff, developed an RDL for each of the indicators associated with the 11 metrics in the model. This meant that all the relevant information available in the battlespace could be organized—including information that could not be considered “scientific” on its face. Instead of tacking on a raw narrative, or even worse, forcing anecdotal evidence into specious numeration, information could be categorized along a well-defined 1–5 rating continuum. In this way the pretense of precision was traded for more reliable accuracy.<sup>5</sup>

The RDLs in table 2 were designed to facilitate an analyst’s rating of the tenure and

quality of district-level government officials by describing how observations aligned with pre-determined definitions. The assessments team developed these definitions by interviewing and seeking input from representatives from all around the division. This included coalition strategic planning officers, operations officers, and intelligence staff, as well as social scientists, civilian analysts, and representatives from coalition civilian government organizations. For the operational assessment product to have weight and relevance in the command, it was crucial that all stakeholders agree on the definitions associated with each RDL.

It is important to note that these definitions included implicit normative assumptions about what was desirable, based on the theory of the environment outlined earlier. If the theory was flawed in any important way, the assessments would also be flawed. For this reason, as noted earlier, the stability theory and its associated indicators had to be reevaluated with every assessments cycle, refining the theory through the addition of new information and updating it as the environment itself changed.

The team had to walk a fine line in developing these definitions. An RDL must provide sufficient analytical guidance, but the more specific the definitions, the more exclusive each level would become. If it became too difficult to describe conditions on the ground using the definitions developed in the RDL, the definitions would need to be reworked to be less restrictive and more useful. Just as the theory required continuous reassessment and reevaluation, so too the indicators derived from it had to be continually updated.

It was also important to peg each RDL to an aspect of the plan. For instance, in Regional Command South in 2011, the planning process was focused on Afghan leadership, and

Table 2. Indicator Rating Definition Levels for Government Official Tenure and Quality

5	Most government officials in role longer than 12 months; government provides essential services and protects the population without need for significant international community (IC) aid or security
4	A government official in position more than 6 months is the rule rather than exception; government provides essential services and protects the population but elements of incompetence limit effectiveness; some IC aid needed
3	Government best characterized by officials being appointed but of relatively short tenure (less than 6 months); government hindered from providing essential services and protecting the population due to incompetence; dependent upon external Afghan government or IC aid to perform many functions
2	Government best characterized by frequent, unpredictable turnover; government cannot provide essential services and protect the population due to incompetence; dependent upon significant external Afghan government or IC help to provide essential services to public; local government in danger of collapse absent external aid
1	Government officials frequently replaced; external Afghan government or IC forced to provide for most essential services

objectives were designed to accomplish this. A given area was assessed as ready for transition when its governance and security apparatus was “sufficient” and “sustainable.” These terms were the anchors around which each RDL was developed. *Success conditions* were defined by transition-readiness, which in turn was defined by sufficiency and sustainability. This allowed headquarters staff to define what sufficiency and sustainability looked like for each indicator—which in turn helped determine what a sufficient and sustainable overall environment would look like.

Yet even the most precise or accurate results are not useful until they are communicated and understood by decisionmakers. The linear Likert scale is simple and clear but misleading. It fails to show the uneven velocity of progress against objectives. Moreover, in a counterinsurgency context, it applies an arbitrary linearity to the phases of the counterinsurgency continuum defined as “shape,” “clear,” “hold with expeditionary forces,” “hold with indigenous forces,” and “build.” An example of such a scale is shown in figure 2, with 1 representing an initial assessment and 2 representing a subsequent assessment of progress.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division team discovered by experience that tying the assessment to predetermined counterinsurgency phases was both uninteresting and analytically unhelpful. There was little or no controversy about which theoretical phase of counterinsurgency the operational headquarters was engaged in at any given time—indeed, the planners had already established this

Figure 2. Example of Linear Counterinsurgency Assessment Scale



before the assessment process even began. Tactically, clearance operations were taking place in one area while indigenous forces were capable of holding other areas without the need of coalition partnering. The tactical, and by extension, the operational battlespace was a jumble of all stages at once.

Perhaps most egregiously, such linear representation could only present objectives in isolation. This implied that each objective was being pursued in a vacuum, divorced from other aspects of the campaign. Decisionmakers intuitively knew that such one-dimensional simplicity belied reality. Linear depictions of progress, because they failed to show dimensionality, represented a lost opportunity to facilitate discussion among key leaders about the efficacy of their plans and the allocation of scarce resources.

In reality, of course, counterinsurgencies are complex adaptive systems and, as such, are nonlinear by definition. They must be assessed and presented as such. Objectives are interrelated, as are the mostly fungible assets applied against them. The visual representation of the team's campaign assessment had to depict that interrelatedness and at its core be a useful tool with which the commander could make more informed decisions about the allocation of resources in the battlespace.

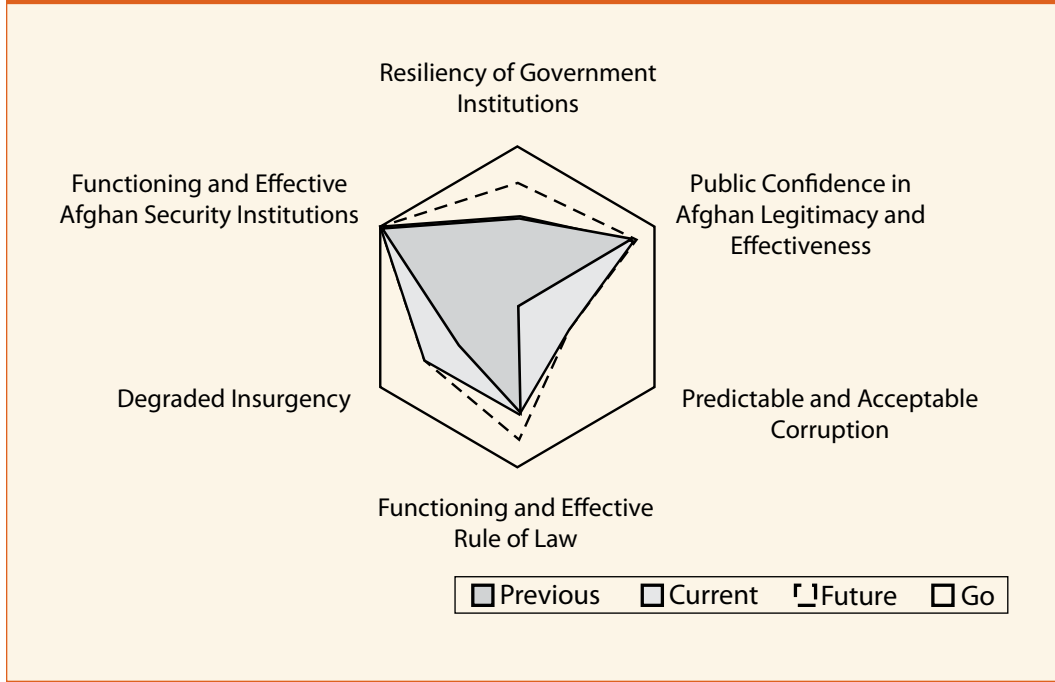
In communicating assessments, the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division team found that a simple multiaxis radar diagram addressed these issues more effectively than a linear color scale. A radar diagram could concisely show multidimensionality. It could also clearly display assessments for the past and present, projections for the future, symmetry of progress, and interrelatedness and completion points for objectives, and it could capture nonlinearity in the environment.

The team used radar diagrams to display detailed assessments of holistic provincial or district stability, broad lines of operation such as "security" or "governance," or detailed assessments of specific objectives. In assessing an objective, each axis represented one of the metrics that affected or was related to the objective. The amalgamation of metrics was used to form the axis representing the assessment of an objective as it related to a larger line of operation. Lines of operation could be then applied to provincial- or regional-level assessments, depicting how each objective applied to the wider environment.

Figure 3 conveys an immense amount in information simply and succinctly, shows multidimensionality, and highlights the interrelatedness of metrics. The darker grey polygon in the middle of the diagram represents the previous assessment. The larger grey polygon, outlined in black, represents the current assessment. It is immediately clear that progress has been made in degrading the insurgency and in improving the popular perception of the predictability and acceptability of corruption. It is also immediately apparent that government security institutions are functioning and effective to the degree sufficient to accomplish the objective as marked on the outer perimeter. The dashed line



Figure 3. Operational Assessment Radar Diagram of Notional Objective



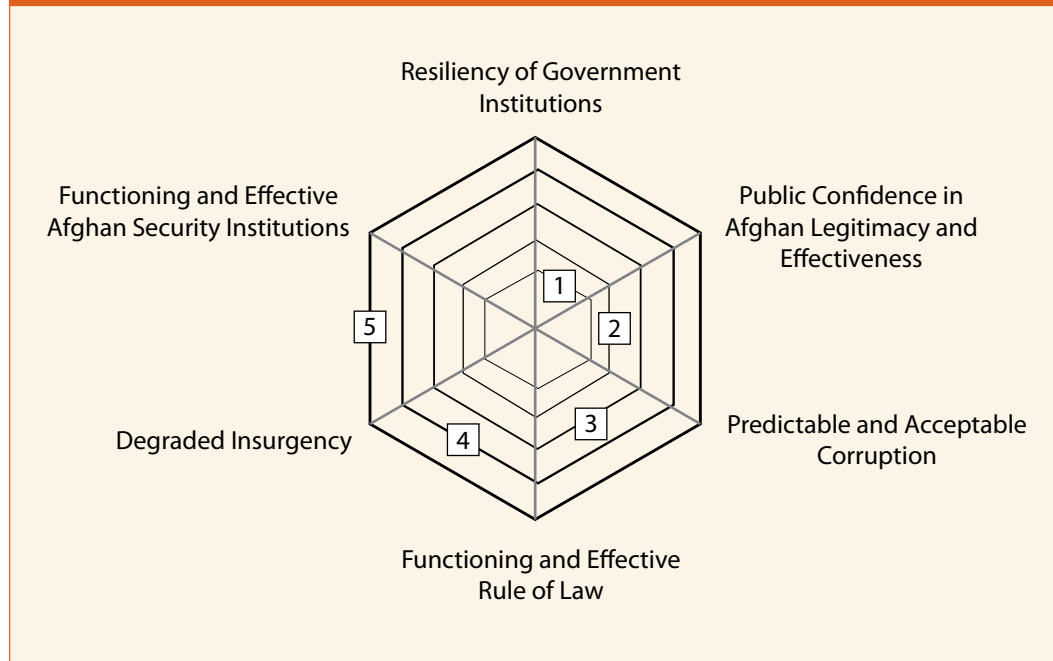
depicts a qualitative projection of the next assessment—progress is projected in the areas of rule of law and resiliency of government institutions. Public confidence in government legitimacy and effectiveness, however, seems to have stalled and is not projected to improve. Most strikingly, there is a significant gap between the current state of the acceptability of corruption and the minimum level required to achieve the desired objective.

As much information as there is on the face of the diagram, much of the aesthetic noise has been stripped away. What is not seen in figure 3 are the axes that mark each metric and the 1–5 RDL scaling. These can be seen in figure 4, which also shows why these diagrams are also referred to as “spider charts.”

Stripping away superfluous design helped the team communicate its operational assessment to decisionmakers. It is extremely unhelpful for an information consumer to get hung up on why an assessment is 2 as opposed to 3—something forgotten by organizations that operate on ratings such as 3.24. The important messages to communicate were movements, projections, and gaps against a defined endstate, which spoke directly to the planning process. The scale, therefore, was a distraction.

Note also that what is seen to be the outer perimeter in figure 3 is actually one unit removed from the actual reach of the diagram—the outermost line in figure 4. As a tool to assess the allocation of resources, and changes to resource allocation in a plan, the design had to be able to depict excess or overachievement. In figure 5, for example, functioning and effective community

Figure 4. Radar Diagram “Invisibles”

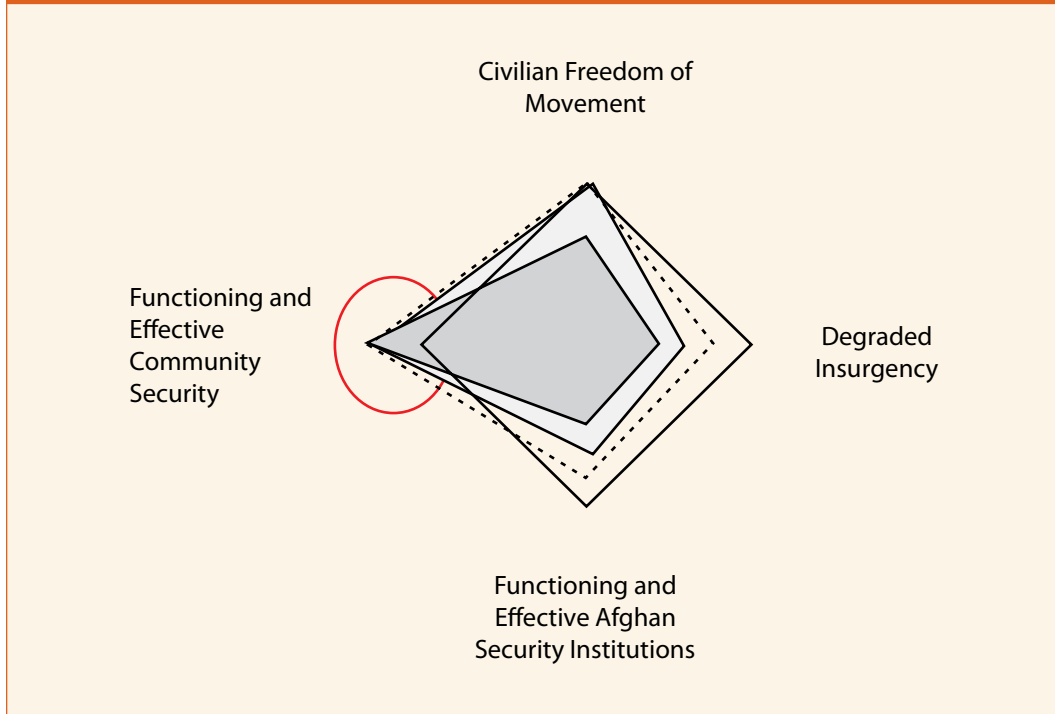


security has progressed past the point deemed necessary to accomplish the objective. In a plan constrained by scarce resources, a decisionmaker would thus have enough data to consider real-locating effort away from this aspect toward degrading the insurgency and improving government security institutions.

Undoubtedly, some would question the utility of information design in the first place. Why not just present information in written form and avoid the risk of being misunderstood? Good graphics might also provide a disincentive for stakeholders to read a deeper narrative and thus leave the wider organization with a shallow understanding of the assessment. The utility of information design has to do partly with an organization’s personality. Many military decisionmakers prefer graphic presentation. Good design can allow information to be absorbed quickly and can show trends and projections more succinctly than prose ever could. What visual depictions may lack in detail they make up for in ease of consumption.

In the U.S. military especially, graphic presentation has become a feature of organizational culture—it would be surprising if an operational assessment were accepted in simple prose. Even if it were, it would make for an extraordinarily long and dull briefing to officers working 18-hour days on little sleep and would thus stand little chance of penetrating their thinking. Assessment products must be widely absorbed throughout an organization to be effective, and the ease of absorbing well-displayed information makes graphics a powerful medium.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 5. Radar Diagram Showing Progress Beyond Sufficiency in an Objective



Information design also has to do with an organization’s capacity. The myriad constant demands on staff officers and harsh working conditions in the deployed environment affect the quality of writing, content, and information consumption. Many organizations that do most of their work in the field respond better to visual depictions than to lengthy written assessments. The usefulness of graphical depiction of assessments comes from not only their wide applicability but also the ease with which they can be implemented and replicated by organizations with limited excess capacity.

There is also an important epistemological difference in how an organization decides to produce and consume information. A written narrative generally presents information as part of an argument in which the author has consciously or unconsciously staked out a position. It is a rare narrative that presents unbranded information without seeking to give the reader the answer. Wandering too far down this path in a document handed to a commanding general, or any powerful executive, might undermine the document’s relevance. Most well-informed consumers do not want to feel steered to a predetermined conclusion.

Well-displayed graphical information, however, is different. It does not smell of predetermined conclusions. Appropriately explained and understood, it empowers thought and discussion. So long as the data are good, a visual depiction need not represent an argument that requires acceptance or dismissal, but can simply act as fuel for ideas.

In fact, it was exactly this discussion among the senior leaders of 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, its general officers, and their subordinate staff that resulted in significant changes to the campaign in Regional Command South in 2010–2011. This medium also provided a forum for the commanding general of 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division to discuss the status of the campaign during his handover of Regional Command South to 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division in October 2011.

Still, it can indeed be powerful to present operational assessments in detailed long-form analysis. For historical purposes, especially regarding warfare, well-reasoned prose and well-designed graphical information can be combined to great effect. The design described here would be an excellent complement to a pithy executive summary detailing the nuances of a given environment. Even if a consumer required narrative in lieu of graphic information—and some do—graphical information is a powerful analytic tool with which to construct a written product, even if it is never shown to anyone beyond the lead analyst.

### Tentative Conclusions

Overall, the process developed by the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division assessments team in Kandahar Province in 2010–2011 was simpler and more agile and could reasonably be expected to be more accurate than previously used assessments methods. The most time-consuming aspect was the inductive field research process and the need to acquire sufficiently grounded field experience to develop a cogent theory of the environment and to define pertinent metrics and indicators. Once this was completed, it then took little analytical effort to form the data into a coherent assessment.

The method's simplicity and usability allowed it to inform command decisions at the

operational level more frequently than other methods. When it was put into practice in Regional Command South in summer 2011, it reduced the time needed to complete the assessment process from 6 to 2 weeks, and finally cut it to a matter of mere days. Eventually, a comprehensive campaign assessment could be produced virtually on demand.

Of course, assessments processes are still open to criticism. The RAND Corporation's Ben Connable argues that metrics and indicators, which by definition are static even when drawn from a coherent theory of the environment, must fail to account for the nuance and complexity in a conflict or postconflict environment. As has often been said, these environments are made up of highly localized and time-sensitive mosaics. Still, choosing the right metrics and developing a descriptive theory—one verified by observations in the field—was highly informative.

This highlights an undeniable weakness in applying a Likert scale to complex environments. As noted, environments have personalities. What matters in one area will not necessarily matter in another. The RDLs in this model had to be applied to broad regions (four Afghan provinces in the case of Regional Command South), and it was extraordinarily unusual for RDLs to apply perfectly in each area. While it would be possible to develop distinct RDLs for each local area, it would be incredibly taxing to most organizations. Even so, to paraphrase the renowned statistician George Box, this model, like all models, was wrong—but it was more useful than those previously tried.

The process laid out here may represent one element in a broader way forward for operational assessments methodology and assessment information design. It accounts for common

criticisms while simultaneously acknowledging that Afghanistan, like any conflict or postconflict environment, is not an academic problem set.

In the summer preceding this method's development, southern Afghanistan was reeling from its most violent period in recent history. The surge of U.S. forces into Taliban strongholds had resulted in spikes in violence. There was an average of nearly 200 discrete violent events per week in the hotly contested areas of central and western Kandahar. In many cases, Afghan security forces were weaker than insurgents operating in the area and often preyed on the people they were supposed to protect. There was little freedom for citizens to conduct routine business or for government officials to move among their constituencies.

Despite appearances, through its first holistic assessment process, the team recognized that security generally progressed faster than improvements in governance and development. This analysis of the friction surrounding the pace of security, governance, and development efforts led to a discussion of techniques for maintaining the security of an area after major combat operations concluded. Failing to explicitly recognize this fact had previously allowed coalition forces to be carried forward under their own military momentum ("taking the fight to the enemy"), leaving immature governance and development structures in their wake with too little mentorship to grow. With new thinking around the concept of a "sustained hold," gains became more entrenched and solidified. The historically contested Arghandab District of central Kandahar experienced a 90 percent reduction in violent activity between the summer of 2010 and summer of 2011.

In the end, the most valuable output of the assessment process is not a final briefing

to the commanding general, a report submitted to a higher headquarters, or a cable sent to the Department of State. It is shared situational understanding among members of the operational staff, between the staff and its commander, and among commanders at different levels that contributes most effectively to leveraging resources against any problem or threat.

**the team recognized that security generally progressed faster than improvements in governance and development**

In its most mature state, the assessment process becomes larger than any staff section. It becomes ingrained in the way each section, agency, or department operates, with a continual dialogue that includes appraisals of how organizational efforts drive toward common goals. With these methods deployed in their staffs, the leadership of 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division in Regional Command South was able to develop a more sophisticated understanding of progress and the interconnected system in which they designed and executed plans. The combined team benefited from the shared situational awareness derived from its process of assessment, adapting its plan to address the changing landscape of the counterinsurgency environment. **PRISM**

**Our thanks to Lieutenant General David W. Barno, USA (Ret.), Ben Connable, Dr. Stephen Downes-Martin, Todd Greentree, Dr. Thomas G. Mahnken, and Lieutenant Commander Harrison Schramm, USN, for their comments and suggestions.**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Ben Connable at the RAND Corporation and Dr. Stephen Downes-Martin at the Naval War College have written some of the most useful and elucidatory work on the subject.

<sup>2</sup> David J. Kilcullen, "Intelligence," in *Understanding Counterinsurgency Warfare*, ed. Thomas Keaney and Thomas Ridd, 145 (London: Taylor and Francis, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> See *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2011), available at <<http://wdr2011.worldbank.org/fulltext>>.

<sup>4</sup> In the process of developing a radically simplified and structured description of the environment, the team found, with mixed feelings, that its efforts tracked closely with the processes of structured simplification and description discussed by James C. Scott in *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note, as Downes-Martin points out, that a priori accuracy is impossible to determine. Accuracy can only be assessed after the objective has been empirically and verifiably accomplished. Only then can retrospection determine if the model was representative of reality. It is likely, however, that there may never be real proof of accuracy, in which case post hoc analysis can only assess the logical applicability of the process.

<sup>6</sup> The U.S. military is harshly criticized for being overly dependent on PowerPoint from within and without. It has been argued that this has wholly supplanted well-written staff work, but that is another subject. Moreover, it concerns the quality of analysis that underpins graphic presentation of information rather than the visual display of information as such.

# In Somalia, Kenya Risks Death by a Thousand Cuts

BY LESLEY ANNE WARNER

For two decades, Somalia has been a failed state, devoid of an effective central government, and the source of multiple threats to the international community. Over the years, Kenya has borne the brunt of Somalia's instability but has historically pursued a multilateral and primarily diplomatic approach to the Somalia problem. Yet in October 2011, with no clear end in sight to the threats spilling over its northern border, Kenya launched Operation *Linda Nchi*, Swahili for "protect the nation." At the outset of the operation, Kenya's objective, according to a government spokesman, was to dismantle the al Qaeda–affiliated Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen,<sup>1</sup> but not to maintain a prolonged presence in Somalia.<sup>2</sup> There has since been speculation that Kenya also seeks to disrupt al-Shabaab's finances by expelling it from the city of Kismayo, whose port is currently the group's largest source of revenue.

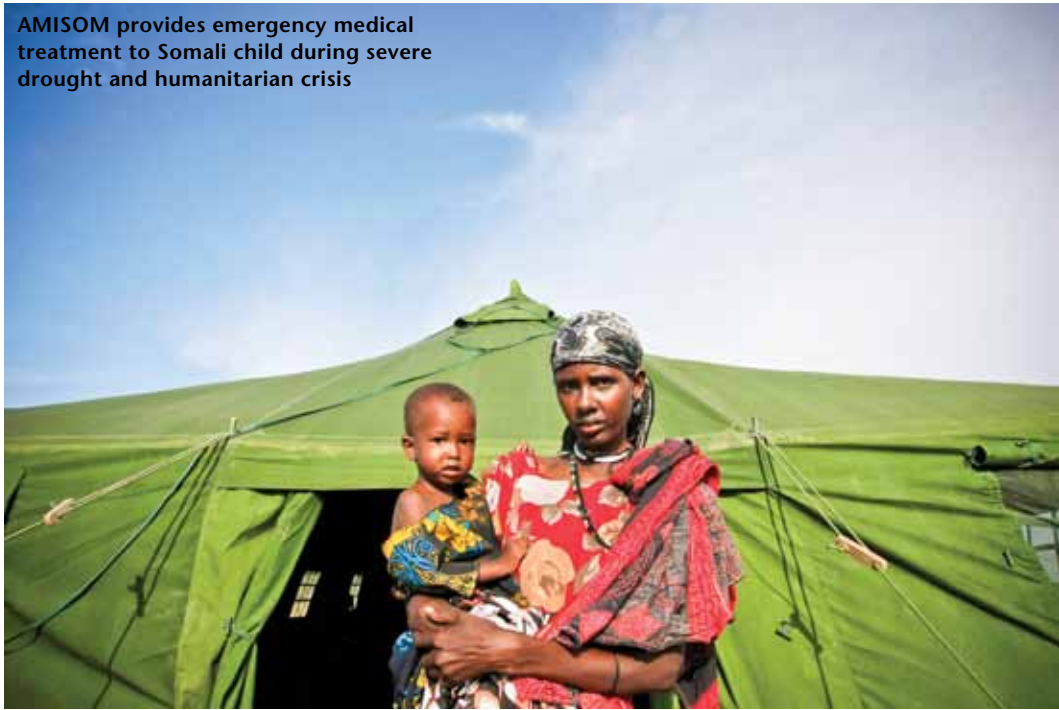
While Kenya ultimately seeks to mitigate the threats that Somalia poses to its own national security, there is a notable disconnect between its stated objectives for Operation *Linda Nchi* and the level of effort required to achieve its desired endstate. Al-Shabaab was but one symptom of Somalia's enduring security, political, and humanitarian challenges; thus, it is doubtful that dismantling al-Shabaab alone would usher in an era of stability in Somalia that would, in turn, make Kenya more secure. Rather, the reality of the situation indicates that Kenya will have to expand both the scope

Lesley Anne Warner is an Africa Analyst in the Center for Strategic Studies at the Center for Naval Analyses.



AMISOM provides emergency medical treatment to Somali child during severe drought and humanitarian crisis

UN Photo (Stuart Price)



and duration of its mission in order to mitigate the range of threats emanating from Somalia. This article provides a context for Kenya's invasion and highlights key challenges that may preclude Kenya's military operations from stabilizing the country.

### Context of Invasion

In many ways, Kenya's invasion of Somalia appeared to fulfill a domestic and regional demand signal for firm and decisive action against a long-festering threat. Instability in Somalia has contributed to piracy in the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean, terrorist activity in East Africa and the Great Lakes Region, and most recently the kidnappings of tourists and aid workers and a massive influx of refugees to Ethiopia and Kenya to escape drought-induced famine. In addition to a genuine need to defend the country's territorial sovereignty, Kenya's decision to invade Somalia may have been a means by which the government could rally support in the lead-up to politically transformative elections in the spring of 2013, demonstrating that key government leaders could take the necessary measures to defend the country. Moreover, considering recent Ethiopian and Ugandan attempts to stabilize Somalia, Kenya may have wanted to prove to its neighbors and to the international community that it was willing and capable of projecting military power to address a major regional security threat.<sup>3</sup>

The United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), the United States, and Ethiopia have largely failed to stabilize Somalia over the years, yet the specter of defeat did not dissuade Kenya from pursuing a similar course of military action. True or not, Kenya believed that it

came with a legitimacy that has been lacking in past interventions, as it was a friendly neighboring country with an intimate understanding of Somalia's clan dynamics. In addition to having its own ethnic Somali population, Kenya has hosted nearly half a million Somali refugees along its border with Somalia and in the suburbs of Nairobi. Furthermore, Kenya lacked the historical antagonism that has plagued Somalia's relationship with Ethiopia, which may make the local population less hostile to Kenyan efforts to stabilize southern Somalia.

At the time of the invasion, the security, political, and humanitarian situation in Somalia was fluid. On the security front, al-Shabaab's power was waning, and the group had executed a "tactical retreat" from Mogadishu in early August.<sup>4</sup> With the help of the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), the country's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was slowly gaining control of the capital city. Regardless, al-Shabaab still maintained control over most of south and central Somalia, and was believed to have a core military strength of between 5,000 and 10,000 fighters.<sup>5</sup> In September and October, unidentified assailants entered Kenya via land and sea, kidnapping tourists from resorts near Lamu and aid workers from the Dadaab refugee complex. Meanwhile, Kenya had allegedly been training local militia groups to act as proxies in southern Somalia, mirroring Ethiopia's strategy along its own border with Somalia.<sup>6</sup> Yet, prior to actually sending its troops across the border in October, Kenya exhibited few overt indications that its military would become directly involved in operations in Somalia.

On the political front, the TFG was increasingly unpopular, ineffective, and bureaucratically deadlocked. In order to

alleviate political infighting, the president of Uganda and the UN special representative for Somalia brokered the Kampala Accord in June 2011, which, among other things, deferred the elections for the president, speaker of parliament, and his deputies until August 2012. In early September, various stakeholders were brought together for the Consultative Meeting on Ending the Transition in Somalia, during which they articulated a detailed roadmap including four benchmarks (security, constitution, political outreach and reconciliation, and good governance) and key tasks and timelines necessary to achieve those benchmarks.<sup>7</sup> Concurrently, there had been speculation for several months that Kenya supported the establishment of a buffer zone in southern Somalia, in a region referred to as Jubaland or Azania. Kenya's subsequent invasion of southern Somalia seemed to confirm fears that the country would continue to break apart, as previously evidenced by Somaliland, which declared independence in 1991, and Puntland and Galmudug, which declared autonomy in 1998 and 2006, respectively.

**Kenya believed that it was a friendly neighboring country with an intimate understanding of Somalia's clan dynamics**

On the humanitarian front, East Africa was experiencing its worst drought in 60 years. In parts of Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia, 13 million people were affected by food insecurity due to the failed short rains (*deyr*) in the fall of 2010 and the erratic long rains (*gu*) in the spring of 2011, which reduced agricultural production and contributed to a spike in food prices. Due to years of conflict, south and central Somalia were particularly hard hit, with

4 million people in dire need of assistance. Compounding this crisis was the fact that al-Shabaab denied Western aid organizations access to drought-affected areas under its control, and in some cases, prevented civilians from fleeing these areas. At the height of the famine, an average of 1,300 Somalis per day were crossing into Kenya, where refugee camps that had been accepting mainly Somali refugees for the past two decades swelled even further past capacity.<sup>8</sup> The Dadaab refugee complex, which by the numbers was technically Kenya's third largest city, now held over

it appeared unlikely that, absent substantial financial support from the international community, Kenya could afford to sustain military operations

400,000 people in sites that had been established to serve 90,000. Under significant pressure, the Kenyan government authorized the opening of the Ifo II site during the summer of 2011 to alleviate the pressure on Dadaab's other refugee camps. Kenya's hesitance to open Ifo II was attributed to concerns that further expanding Dadaab would add an aura of permanence to these camps, encouraging refugees to continue coming to Kenya, and making them reluctant to return to Somalia. The Kenyan government also feared that this could exacerbate the economic and environmental impact of the camps on the country, in addition to stoking tensions with the residents of North Eastern Province, who also suffered from periodic drought, food insecurity, and underdevelopment but were not privy to the humanitarian assistance provided to Somali refugees.<sup>9</sup> Given the circumstances of this most recent influx of refugees, the Kenyan

government argued that under international law, Somalis fleeing drought rather than conflict should not be considered asylum seekers. Kenya concurrently advocated that humanitarian assistance be provided to drought-affected populations in areas within Somalia's own borders that were cleared of al-Shabaab and controlled by friendly militias.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, at the time of Kenya's invasion of Somalia, various security, political, and humanitarian developments were under way, with no clear indications that Kenya's incursion would add to or detract from the melee. Widely believed to be a pretext for Kenya's invasion, al-Shabaab activity was just one of a range of broad, enduring threats that Somalia posed to Kenya's national security. The following section provides an analysis of some of the key challenges the Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) has faced and may still face in Somalia in light of the context in which Operation *Linda Nchi* has occurred.

### Key Challenges for the KDF in Somalia

**Cost and Timing of Operation.** After an initially swift invasion, the advance of the KDF in the Gedo, Middle Juba, and Lower Juba regions of southern Somalia came to an abrupt halt as a result of the *deyr* rains, which generally last from October to December. For several weeks, poor road conditions and flooding impeded KDF mobility and sustainment, and these logistical challenges were likely significant cost multipliers. With a declining currency, massive fiscal deficit, and rising commodity prices, it appeared unlikely that, absent substantial financial support from the international community, Kenya could afford to sustain military operations for a prolonged period. Estimates of how much the war was costing Kenya ranged widely—from \$233,000 to \$2.4 million U.S. dollars per month.<sup>11</sup>

The immediate delay that followed Kenya's original incursion robbed invading forces of the opportunity to catch al-Shabaab off guard, and gave its fighters time to react, regroup, and potentially regain the strategic initiative. At the time of the invasion, al-Shabaab was in serious decline as a result of internal fissures regarding global vs. local Islamist agendas, their high-casualty tactics and draconian methods employed to control the population, and most recently, their mismanagement of the response to the famine.<sup>12</sup> By introducing foreign military forces on Somali soil at this critical time, Kenya risked re-creating similar dynamics that led to al-Shabaab's rise in 2006—uniting factions with disparate interests to fight a common enemy.

**Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures.** Although it has one of the most professional militaries in Africa, Kenya's only recent combat experience has been its extensive involvement in AU and UN peacekeeping operations. Consequently, the KDF had only limited experience conducting joint expeditionary operations and virtually no experience fighting an unconventional enemy. Faced with a conventional KDF advance, al-Shabaab generally opted not to stand and fight, but rather to draw the invading force further into Somalia. This has the potential advantage of spreading the Kenyan military's force strength and stretching its supply lines, making it more vulnerable to attack by small groups of al-Shabaab fighters.<sup>13</sup> These fighters may employ asymmetric tactics such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs), suicide bombs, ambushes, and snipers to neutralize the KDF's technological superiority and conventional capabilities. While Kenya has faced minimal resistance thus far in southern Somalia, al-Shabaab is expected to mount a fierce defense of Kismayo, where

the KDF might find itself fighting a guerrilla war in an urban environment. This would require a change in tactics, which may include a shift away from reliance on airstrikes against al-Shabaab strongholds in favor of increased ground operations that could expose the KDF to greater combat casualties—especially if Kenyan forces attempt to minimize civilian casualties by avoiding indiscriminate fire and shelling heavily populated areas.

As the KDF continues its advance into southern Somalia, it will have to determine how best to dismantle al-Shabaab—which was the stated goal of its operations. The option(s) that Kenya pursues to this end may temper the effectiveness of the KDF's campaign and the sustainability of its military gains. Kenya can attempt to counter-radicalize or otherwise co-opt insurgents via political or economic means; pursue, then capture or kill more hardline al-Shabaab members; or being satisfied with clearing al-Shabaab from southern Somalia, simply allow the militants to disperse to the north so they can regroup to fight another day. If Kenya does not counter-radicalize, capture, or kill the majority of al-Shabaab members during the course of its operations in Somalia, there is no guarantee that its northern border will remain secure from attacks by remnants of the militant group.

as the KDF continues its advance into southern Somalia, it will have to determine how best to dismantle al-Shabaab

**Force Strength.** Conventional wisdom states that a nonpermissive intervention with limited indigenous security capacity may require a troop-to-population ratio of 10 to 20 soldiers per 1,000

people.<sup>14</sup> The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs puts the population of the Gedo, Middle Juba, and Lower Juba regions at just over 1 million people.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, the KDF may need as few as 10,000 to as many as 20,000 troops to stabilize this part of Somalia.

should TFG-aligned forces commit human rights abuses, as they sometimes have in the past, the population might perceive the KDF as guilty by association

The KDF entered Somalia with approximately 2,000 troops and has been working with as many as 4,500 Somali militia members who are, for the moment, aligned with the Somali government.<sup>16</sup> (To be clear, this is a high-end estimate of TFG-aligned militia members.)

As the invasion progresses, the KDF plans to turn conquered territories over to TFG-aligned forces, such as the Ras Kamboni Brigade, Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a (ASWJ), and the Kenya-trained Jubaland militia. However, Kenya's reliance on these forces has potential peaks and pitfalls. On one hand, this could increase the legitimacy of Kenya's operation in the eyes of the local population. On the other hand, such forces in Somalia tend to have transient allegiances based on temporal self-interests and may eventually suffer the high defection rates seen with TFG troops in other parts of the country.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, should TFG-aligned forces commit human rights abuses, as they sometimes have in the past, the population might perceive the KDF as guilty by association. As a result, the Kenyan forces run the risk of losing the goodwill and cooperation of the local population, which are vital in such operations.

**Civilian Casualties and Humanitarian Access.** Al-Shabaab has routinely restricted

population movements in parts of Somalia, and has used civilians as human shields by attacking enemy forces from heavily populated areas and withdrawing immediately. In many instances, TFG and AMISOM forces have subsequently responded with indiscriminate fire and shelling, causing significant civilian casualties.<sup>18</sup> To prevent the local population from being supportive of KDF or TFG presence in the area, al-Shabaab is likely to resurrect this human shielding tactic as the invading forces advance toward more heavily populated areas. Aware of the fallout that would result from heavy civilian casualties during Operation *Linda Nchi*, the Kenyan military issued a warning to civilians via Twitter that attacks on known al-Shabaab camps near 10 towns, including Kismayo, were imminent.<sup>19</sup> Yet civilians who heed KDF warnings and vacate these areas may face additional hardship in inhospitable rural areas, with limited access to shelter, clean water, and health care. Consequently, as it advances toward more heavily populated areas, the KDF may be unable to minimize civilian casualties without placing local communities at greater risk for the second-order effects of conflict, such as disease and starvation.

The Kenyan military appears to understand the important role that humanitarian assistance could play in stabilizing southern Somalia, but the KDF's operationalization of this understanding has not been evident. While the Kenyan military was anticipating that humanitarian aid organizations would take the initiative and enter areas cleared of al-Shabaab, there has been a notable shortfall of humanitarian assistance delivery in these areas due to a possible lack of prior coordination with the relevant humanitarian stakeholders or a divergence in priorities between the military and these stakeholders.<sup>20</sup> Many communities in southern Somalia remain heavily reliant on humanitarian

assistance, but there have been reports that KDF operations have, albeit unintentionally, created operational challenges for humanitarian access.<sup>21</sup> Military operations in the region have limited the ability of the population to move to areas of greater food security, as they fear being caught in the crossfire. Such operations have also delayed the distribution of seeds and tools so communities can prepare for the planting season and mitigate food insecurity during the months ahead. With these factors in mind, any local support that Kenyan forces are able to gain may wane as communities in southern Somalia continue to experience hardship as a result of KDF operations.

***Control of Territory and Local Governance.*** Although establishing mechanisms of governance in southern Somalia is not within the purview of KDF operations, challenges related to control over local territory have the potential to detract from, or even derail, any military success Kenya may encounter. For example, given the strategic and economic value that Kismayo represents for any faction that holds it, there is no guarantee that the fight over the city would stop if it is conquered and turned over to TFG-aligned militias. According to the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia, al-Shabaab generates between \$35 million and \$50 million per year from port revenues from Kismayo, and to a lesser extent, Marka and Baraawe in Lower Shabelle.<sup>22</sup> With the common enemy either vanquished or temporarily dispersed, TFG alliances of convenience may collapse, as armed groups compete for control over these lucrative territories. Therefore, expelling al-Shabaab from southern Somalia carries a risk that stability will not come to this part of Somalia unless some political authority—local or national—develops or is imposed to fill the power vacuum left by

al-Shabaab. Many analysts of Somali affairs are not optimistic that the Kampala Accord and its consequent roadmap to end the transitional period will result in the establishment of an effective central government.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, in the absence of a central authority, local governance may be most likely to have an impact on KDF operations in southern Somalia.

Given the amount of local, national, and international equities in Somalia, local government would need to be palatable, at a minimum, not only to the population, but also to the TFG and the international community. These stakeholders are not monolithic, so the KDF will have to be sensitive to a wide range of equities during the course of its operations.

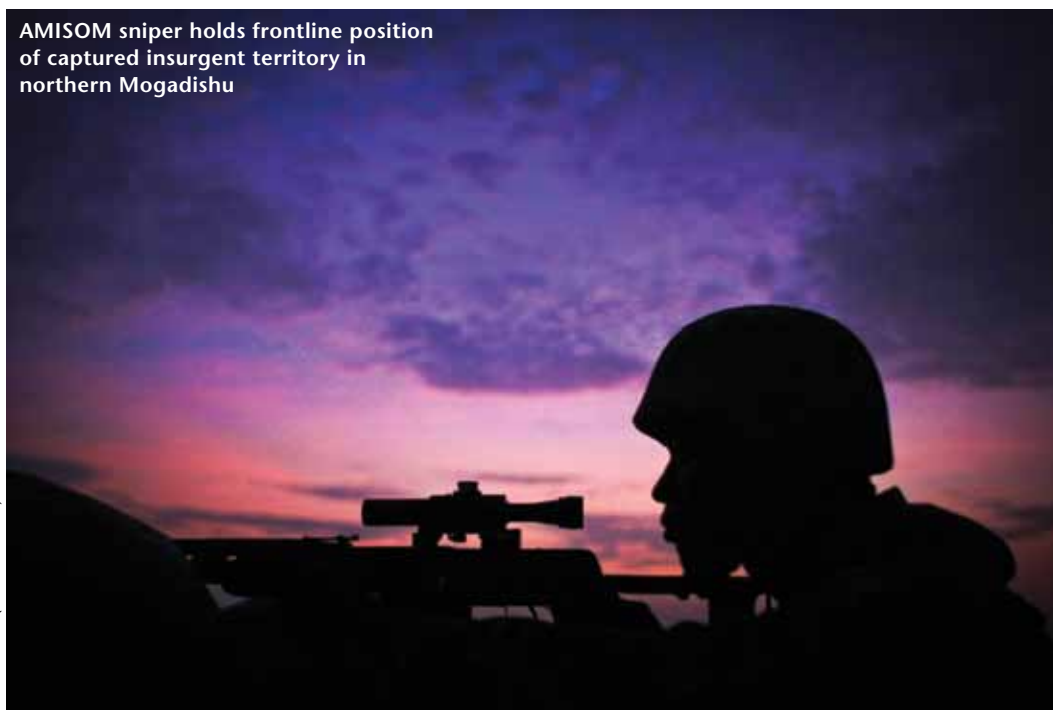
there have been reports that KDF operations have, albeit unintentionally, created operational challenges for humanitarian access

Presumably, the population would want a local governing authority to assume several functions, including mediating disputes, providing social services, ensuring the rule of law, and providing protection from interclan violence or future al-Shabaab retribution. Since the TFG is the internationally recognized government of Somalia, local government in southern Somalia may have to avoid the impression that it is going the way of Somaliland or Puntland, which have declared independence and autonomy, respectively. Otherwise, the TFG might perceive this entity as yet another threat to the country's territorial integrity, or to the eroding power of the central government in Mogadishu. To satisfy the international community's desire for stability in Somalia, local government might have to pursue actions such



AMISOM sniper holds frontline position  
of captured insurgent territory in  
northern Mogadishu

UN Photo (Stuart Price)



as renouncing support for the activities of terrorist organizations and allowing Western humanitarian assistance organizations to operate in the region, for example.<sup>24</sup> Regardless of how governance develops within the KDF's operating area, if some sort of political engagement strategy is not part of Kenya's campaign plan, any military gains it might make in southern Somalia may be short lived. That said, a local government that develops while these territories are under KDF occupation runs the risk of being perceived as imposed rather than locally constructed.

**Exit Strategy?** From the outset of Operation *Linda Nchi*, many have questioned the nature, or even the existence of Kenya's exit strategy. Several weeks into its operations in Somalia, the Kenyan government accepted requests by the African Union and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) for it to consider integrating its forces into the next phase of AMISOM troop deployment.<sup>25</sup> Since AMISOM received its initial mandate in January 2007, AU member states have not been able to muster enough troops to meet its authorized force strength. As of mid-April 2012, there are approximately 10,000 Ugandan, Burundian, and Djiboutian soldiers in Somalia. The UN Security Council has approved the AU request to expand AMISOM force strength to 17,731 soldiers and absorb KDF troops as part of the mission.<sup>26</sup> Burundi has pledged to send an additional battalion, which may deploy in mid-2012. Djibouti and Sierra Leone have pledged one battalion each; the former deployed an initial contingent of 200 soldiers in December 2011 and is expected to send another 650 shortly, while the projected deployment date of the latter is unknown. If all deployment commitments are met, an anticipated KDF contingent of 4,660 troops would meet authorized AMISOM force strength. While there had been concerns that Kenya would resist having KDF troops



under the mission's Ugandan force commander, it appears that KDF officers will be integrated into AMISOM leadership as the heads of intelligence and public relations.<sup>27</sup>

Yet the lack of adequate force strength is just one of the challenges AMISOM faces. Unable to finance the mission on its own, the African Union has had to rely on international assistance. As a result, funding for predeployment training, payment of troop allowances, logistic support, and reimbursement for contingent-owned equipment have been ad hoc, insufficient, and often unreliable. Such financial problems have contributed to the inability of troop-contributing countries to secure the support they need in order to deploy to Somalia in a timely fashion, and they may also delay the arrival of the expected reinforcements until well into 2012.

Despite AMISOM's many challenges, increased cooperation between KDF and AU operations could be mutually beneficial. Kenya and the African Union share a desired endstate in Somalia; both ultimately seek to eliminate the threats that result from continued instability in the country. Similarly, both Kenya and the African Union need something from each other. Likely inundated by unanticipated operational costs, Kenya would like to "re-hat" KDF troops in Somalia under AMISOM in order to alleviate the financial burden of the war. In return, the African Union would like KDF troops to help consolidate the gains that AMISOM has made since al-Shabaab's retreat from Mogadishu and create the space necessary for the effective implementation of the roadmap to end the transitional period. To this end, the African Union is developing a concept of operations that would allow AMISOM to extend the authority of the TFG beyond the capital city. As part of AMISOM, Kenyan troops would continue to operate in

the Middle and Lower Juba regions, where al-Shabaab most directly threatens Kenyan interests.<sup>28</sup> Ugandan and Burundian troops would be deployed to the Banadir, Middle and Lower Shabelle, Gedo, Bay, and Bakool regions, while Djiboutian troops would be deployed to the Galgudud, Mudug, and Hiraa regions.<sup>29</sup>

However, considering the current security environment, it may not be feasible for AMISOM to exert pro-TFG control from Mogadishu down through the aforementioned operating areas—even if it were to reach its authorized force strength. AMISOM has become overextended as a result of al-Shabaab's retreat from the capital.<sup>30</sup> Since mid-November 2011, there has been a notable uptick in attacks against TFG and AMISOM forces in Mogadishu. The recent surge in violence in addition to the lack of critical enablers and force multipliers, such as air assets and military engineering capabilities, may complicate AMISOM's intent to pursue operations outside the city.

**unable to finance the mission on its own, the African Union has had to rely on international assistance**

As part of its exit strategy, Kenya might also hope that the United Nations would eventually assume the AMISOM mission, providing manpower to relieve battle-weary KDF troops, and a reliable resource stream to alleviate the problems the AU mission has faced. Yet AMISOM itself has suffered from unfulfilled commitments made by the international community. The original understanding was that AMISOM would evolve into a UN peacekeeping mission upon the expiration of its initial mandate in June 2007, but this has not occurred. Efforts by the United Nations to solicit force commitments from member states

to relieve AMISOM have been met with failure in the past, and there are few indications that the willingness of UN member states to volunteer forces has changed.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, in the current global financial environment, it may be unlikely that the international community would devote resources to what has long been viewed as a losing battle. That said, if there is a breakthrough on the political side (as a result of the Kampala Accord and the roadmap to end the transition) or the military side (as a result of KDF and/or AMISOM operations), this may increase the willingness of UN member states to contribute forces or funding.

by invading Somalia, Kenya provided ample justification for al-Shabaab to finally make good on its threats

### Implications for Domestic Security

Aside from the challenges that Operation *Linda Nchi* may encounter, the invasion of Somalia may have made Kenya more vulnerable on the domestic front. Since al Qaeda's 1998 bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya has feared similar high-casualty acts of terrorism. Although al-Shabaab has threatened to attack Kenya for several years, the group has never executed a substantial terrorist attack on Kenyan soil. By invading Somalia, Kenya provided ample justification for al-Shabaab to finally make good on its threats, and it is all but certain that the group will do its best to bring the war home to the Kenyan population. Due to the fact that al-Shabaab was reeling prior to the invasion, large-scale reprisals similar to the 2010 bombings in Kampala, Uganda, are unlikely. More likely are more small-scale "lone wolf"

attacks by al-Shabaab sympathizers in urban areas and along the border in Wajir, Mandera, and Garissa of the kind that have been occurring since late October 2011.

Kenya's recent approach to Somalia has also risked exacerbating tensions with its ethnic Somali community. Days into Operation *Linda Nchi*, the government announced a parallel operation to root out al-Shabaab sympathizers in Kenya, asserting that al-Shabaab "was like a big animal with a tail in Somalia and a head in Eastleigh [a suburb of Nairobi that is home to many Somali-owned businesses and a large refugee community]." There have already been reports documenting serious human rights violations, including cases of ethnic Somalis being profiled and discriminated against due to their ethnicity, and in the worst cases being beaten and mistreated, arbitrarily detained, and even deported unless they have appropriate documentation of their legal status in Kenya or can afford to bribe local security forces.<sup>32</sup> The manner in which Kenya is handling its Kenyan Somali and Somali refugee communities risks alienating these communities and could create an attractive recruitment pool for al-Shabaab's plans to attack Kenya.

### Conclusion

In spite of Kenya's articulation of a limited vision for Operation *Linda Nchi*, it has signed on for a mission that has the potential to be much broader in scope and duration. Al-Shabaab was just one symptom of Somalia's instability; therefore, dismantling the group will not necessarily eliminate the many threats flowing over the Kenya-Somalia border. Considering the range of threats that have continued to emanate from Somalia over the past two decades, it is actually stability that is Kenya's desired endstate in Somalia—not simply the demise of al-Shabaab.

If KDF operations are intended to be a means by which Kenya can realize its desired endstate, the country will ultimately have to address Somalia's other sources of instability that are not directly related to al-Shabaab.

Yet even Kenya's al-Shabaab-centric military operations in Somalia are fraught with challenges. The timing of Operation *Linda Nchi* was suboptimal, starting at the outset of rainy season, at a time when al-Shabaab's ability to mobilize support was withering, and at a time of great humanitarian crisis within the KDF operating area. In addition to having limited combat experience for such complex operations, the KDF did not enter Somalia with sufficient force strength to stabilize even the regions adjacent to Kenyan territory. To spearhead its advance, the KDF worked with local proxies that tended to be unreliable and have shifting interests and allegiances. Although many Somalia analysts were not optimistic about a political breakthrough at the national level, Kenya's invasion did not give developments such as the Kampala Accord and the roadmap to end the transition sufficient time to fail or succeed. At the local level, it was unclear what structure of local or national governance would fill the vacuum left by al-Shabaab, allowing military gains to lead to a sustained increase in security and stability in the region. Finally, Kenya's exit strategy, if it may be called such, was predicated on the willingness, capability, and reliability of actors such as the African Union and United Nations, which have proved to be quite the contrary in the past.

Certainly, Kenya has the right to defend its territorial sovereignty from external threats, yet by invading Somalia with such limited objectives and military capabilities, it may have also made itself more vulnerable to al-Shabaab on the domestic front. With the

situation as it was at the time of the invasion, Kenya should have considered keeping its military involvement light, under the radar, and restricted to an advisory role. Given the extent and complexity of the situation in Somalia, the bulk of the war chest might have been better allocated toward better protecting the Kenyan homeland to make the country less of a soft target for terrorist attacks. On land, Kenya should have considered focusing on securing its border with Somalia, rooting out corruption related to cross-border smuggling and forged travel documents, and increasing domestic intelligence and surveillance capabilities to better detect external and possibly homegrown threats. Internal security forces should have sought to resist profiling ethnic Somalis and perpetrating human rights abuses in order to avoid alienating these populations. At sea, Kenya might have prioritized expanding its coast guard so that it not only has sufficient assets to patrol territorial waters, but is also capable of conducting maritime interdiction operations that target illicit activity in the maritime domain that potentially fuels the war machine in Somalia and facilitates terrorist access to Kenyan territory.

**the KDF did not enter Somalia with sufficient force strength to stabilize even the regions adjacent to Kenyan territory**

Operation *Linda Nchi* has many inherent risks and potential points of failure. Given that Somalia's sources of instability have political and humanitarian dimensions, it is unlikely that military operations alone will stabilize the country and ensure Kenya's national security and territorial sovereignty. For Kenya, the best outcome of its operations

would be that the international community quickly assumes some of the burden and Kenya would get some reprieve from Somalia's instability. More likely, however, Kenya will find itself bogged down in Somalia as part of AMISOM, prey to the intransigence of the TFG and the shifting alliances of proxy militias, the victim of al-Shabaab retributions on the home front, and suffering from the perpetual fatigue of the international community to keep throwing money at the Somalia problem. **PRISM**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> As of early December, al-Shabaab was reportedly considering changing its name to the Somali Islamic Emirate (Imaarah Islamiya).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Wilkinson, "Will Kenya's Battle with Islamists in Somalia succeed?" CNN, November 3, 2011, available at <[www.cnn.com/2011/11/02/world/africa/kenya-battle-islamists-somalia/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2011/11/02/world/africa/kenya-battle-islamists-somalia/index.html)>.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Onyango-Obbo, "How War Boosts Kenya's Regional, Global Clout," *The East African*, November 20, 2011, available at <[www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/How+war+boosts+Kenyas+regional+global+clout+/-/2558/1276220/-/muxcupz/-/index.html](http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/How+war+boosts+Kenyas+regional+global+clout+/-/2558/1276220/-/muxcupz/-/index.html)>.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations (UN) Department of Public Information, press conference by Special Representative of Secretary-General for Somalia, August 10, 2011, available at <[www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2011/110810\\_Somalia.doc.htm](http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2011/110810_Somalia.doc.htm)>.

<sup>5</sup> International Crisis Group, *Somalia: The Transitional Government on Life Support*, Crisis Group Africa Report No. 170, February 21, 2011, available at <[www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/horn-of-africa/somalia/170%20Somalia%20The%20Transitional%20Government%20on%20Life%20Support.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/africa/horn-of-africa/somalia/170%20Somalia%20The%20Transitional%20Government%20on%20Life%20Support.pdf)>.

<sup>6</sup> Human Rights Watch, "'You Don't Know Who to Blame': War Crimes in Somalia," August 2011, available at <[www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/somalia0811webcover.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/somalia0811webcover.pdf)>.

<sup>7</sup> UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia," December 9, 2011, available at <[http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Full\\_Document\\_62.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Full_Document_62.pdf)>.

<sup>8</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees, "UN High Commissioner for Refugees Applauds Kenya's Decision to Open Ifo II Camp," available at <[www.unhcr.org/4e2019869.html](http://www.unhcr.org/4e2019869.html)>.

<sup>9</sup> Xan Rice, "Somali refugee settlement in Kenya swells as row grows over empty camp," *The Guardian*, available at <[www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/aug/11/somali-refugees-kenya-camp-empty](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/aug/11/somali-refugees-kenya-camp-empty)>.

<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch.

<sup>11</sup> See Fred Oluoch, "Why Kenya is not making any strides in the war against Al Shabaab two months into incursion," *The East African*, December 12, 2011, available at <[www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/-/2558/1287200/-/nh8xxyz/-/index.html](http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/-/2558/1287200/-/nh8xxyz/-/index.html)>, and "How joining Amisom will boost Kenya's campaign in Somalia," *The East African*, December 12, 2011, available at <[www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/How+joining+Amisom+will+boost+Kenya+campaign++in+Somalia/-/2558/1287192/-/6aebgb/-/index.html](http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/How+joining+Amisom+will+boost+Kenya+campaign++in+Somalia/-/2558/1287192/-/6aebgb/-/index.html)>.

<sup>12</sup> International Crisis Group, *Somalia's Divided Islamists*, Crisis Group Africa Briefing No. 74, May 18, 2010, available at <[www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/horn-of-africa/somalia/B74%20Somalias%20Divided%20Islamists.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/horn-of-africa/somalia/B74%20Somalias%20Divided%20Islamists.pdf)>.

<sup>13</sup> "Somalia: Rebels Change Tactics Against Kenya Forces," *AllAfrica.com*, November 12, 2011, available at <<http://allafrica.com/stories/20111120171.html>>.

<sup>14</sup> James Dobbins et al., *The Beginner's Guide to Nation-Building* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007), xxvi.

## IN SOMALIA, KENYA RISKS DEATH BY A THOUSAND CUTS

<sup>15</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Somalia Drought/Famine Maps, Facts and Analysis, available at <<http://ochaonline.un.org/somalia/Clusters/AreaBasedMapsFamineSituationAnalysis/tabid/7633/language/en-US/Default.aspx>>.

<sup>16</sup> “Kenya’s Militia Allies in the Somalia Incursion,” Stratfor, October 31, 2011, available at <[www.stratfor.com/analysis/20111031-kenyas-militia-allies-somalia-incursion](http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20111031-kenyas-militia-allies-somalia-incursion)>.

<sup>17</sup> UN Security Council, “Letter dated March 10, 2010, from the Chairman of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea addressed to the President of the Security Council,” available at <[www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2010/91](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2010/91)>.

<sup>18</sup> Human Rights Watch.

<sup>19</sup> “Kenya Warns al-Shabab of Bombing by Twitter,” BBC, November 1, 2011, available at <[www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15547512](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15547512)>.

<sup>20</sup> Katharine Houreld, “Kenya Army: Somali Villagers Need Food Aid,” December 15, 2011, Associated Press, available at <[www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5gt4h6Gk6eUsfSPzLr9GNlhRwLFw?docId=1e001366776d404fa36adba91dfc0a36](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5gt4h6Gk6eUsfSPzLr9GNlhRwLFw?docId=1e001366776d404fa36adba91dfc0a36)>.

<sup>21</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Somalia: Situation Reports,” available at <<http://ochaonline.un.org/somalia/Reports/SituationReports/tabid/7729/language/en-US/Default.aspx>>. See also Oxfam America, “Somalia: International leaders should focus on saving lives and recovery,” October 18, 2011, available at <[www.oxfamamerica.org/press/pressreleases/somalia-international-leaders-should-focus-on-saving-lives-and-recovery](http://www.oxfamamerica.org/press/pressreleases/somalia-international-leaders-should-focus-on-saving-lives-and-recovery)>.

<sup>22</sup> UN Security Council, “Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council resolution 1916 (2010),” July 18, 2011, available at <[www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2011/433](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2011/433)>.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Onyiego, “Somalia Transitional Roadmap Ambitious, Analysts Skeptical,” Voice of America, September 7, 2011, available at <[www.voanews.com/english/news/africa/east/Somalia-Transitional-Roadmap-Ambitious-Analysts-Skeptical-129386923.html](http://www.voanews.com/english/news/africa/east/Somalia-Transitional-Roadmap-Ambitious-Analysts-Skeptical-129386923.html)>.

<sup>24</sup> For nuanced recommendations for how the United States, for example, could coexist with an Islamic authority that emerges in Somalia, see Bronwyn E. Bruton, *Somalia: A New Approach*, Council on Foreign Relations Special Report No. 52, March 2010, available at <[www.cfr.org/somalia/somalia/p21421](http://www.cfr.org/somalia/somalia/p21421)>.

<sup>25</sup> See African Union, “Communiqué of the 302<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Peace and Security Council,” December 2, 2011, available at <[www.au.int/en/sites/default/files/Communique%20of%20the%20302%20PSC%20Meeting%20on%20Somalia.pdf](http://www.au.int/en/sites/default/files/Communique%20of%20the%20302%20PSC%20Meeting%20on%20Somalia.pdf)>; and Intergovernmental Authority on Development, “Communiqué of the 19th Extra-ordinary Session of the IGAD Assembly of Heads of State and Government on the Situation in Somalia and a Briefing on the Outstanding Issues of the Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement,” November 25, 2011, available at <[http://igad.int/attachments/375\\_Final\\_Communique\\_of\\_the\\_19th\\_Extra-ordinary\\_session\\_of\\_the\\_IGAD\\_HoS.pdf](http://igad.int/attachments/375_Final_Communique_of_the_19th_Extra-ordinary_session_of_the_IGAD_HoS.pdf)>.

<sup>26</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2036 (2012), “Security Council Requests African Union to Increase Troop Level of Somalia Mission to 17,700, Establish Expanded Presence in Keeping with Strategic Concept,” available at <[www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sc10550.doc.htm](http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sc10550.doc.htm)>.

<sup>27</sup> David Ochami, “KDF deploys 16 officers in expanded Amisom secretariat,” *The Standard* (Nairobi), March 13, 2012, available at <[www.standardmedia.co.ke/health/InsidePage.php?id=2000053939&cid=4&currentPage=1](http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/health/InsidePage.php?id=2000053939&cid=4&currentPage=1)>.

<sup>28</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2036 (2012).

<sup>29</sup> UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia,” August 30, 2011, available at <<http://daccess-ddsny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/481/76/PDF/N1148176.pdf?OpenElement>>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia pursuant to Security Council resolution 1863 (2009),” April 16, 2009, available at <<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/302/41/PDF/N0930241.pdf?OpenElement>>.

<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Kenya: Security Forces Arbitrarily Detaining People,” November 28, 2011, available at <[www.hrw.org/news/2011/11/28/kenya-security-forces-arbitrarily-detaining-people](http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/11/28/kenya-security-forces-arbitrarily-detaining-people)>. See also Sudarsan Raghavan, “In Kenya, Somalis Become Casualties of Africa’s Latest War,” *The Washington Post*, November 25, 2011, available at <[www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/in-kenya-somalis-become-casualties-of-africas-latest-war/2011/11/21/gIQAuUGXvN\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/in-kenya-somalis-become-casualties-of-africas-latest-war/2011/11/21/gIQAuUGXvN_story.html)>.

# The Opportunity Cost of Security

BY DOV S. ZAKHEIM

The United States has been fighting wars, to a greater or lesser extent, for the better part of the past 20 years. Indeed, hardly a year has passed during that period in which American forces were not involved in combat somewhere in the world. At the same time, the extent to which the United States and its military should be involved in nation-building, which increasingly was tied to the outcome of American military operations, became a major issue during the 1990s. In fact, there were two aspects to this issue, both of which were, and still are, hotly debated.

First, there was the question of whether the United States should be involved in nation-building at all. The American record has at best been mixed. The United States has scored four major successes since World War II: Germany, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Both Germany and Japan were literally flattened in war, however. With populations both highly educated and well trained, they were able to make the best use of the influx of Western development funds that restored their economies and societies. South Korea and Taiwan were led by authoritarian dictators for decades. They were able to mobilize highly motivated and increasingly well-educated societies to achieve remarkable economic growth that was then sustained once their political systems became democratic.

On the other hand, the American record in other places was one of unmitigated failure. Indeed, in the case of Haiti, neither a nearly 20-year occupation by the U.S. Marine Corps from 1915 to 1933 nor multiple American interventions since then could lift that unfortunate nation out of its centuries-long misery. The case for an American policy for nation-building was therefore hardly compelling.

Second, even if the United States were to undertake building or rebuilding nations, there was no agreement regarding the degree to which the military should be involved. This latter debate came to the fore in the 1990s after the disastrous intervention in Somalia. Later during that decade, prompted by America's involvement in the Balkans, John Hillen, who would go on to serve as Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs in the George W. Bush administration,

Dov S. Zakheim was Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) and Chief Financial Officer from 2001 to 2004. This article is extracted from a Keynote Address to the International Conference on Civil-Military Development of Security Capacity at the National Defense University, September 7, 2011.



argued metaphorically that “the military doesn’t do windows” and that soldiers should not be in the business of helping old ladies to cross streets.

To a great extent, this second debate was over America’s role in “peacekeeping,” one that many analysts preferred to be left to the United Nations, European states, Australia, or the Organisation of African Unity, as locale and circumstances dictated. But it was also a question of the degree to which the military’s resources should be diverted from its fundamental mission of fighting and winning the Nation’s wars. Critics charged that the opportunity cost of peacekeeping on the part of the American military was simply too high.

The debate over nation-building, and the military’s role in it, was set aside after 9/11. There was a focus not on nation-building, but rather on state- and institution-building—governance, economic modernization, rule of law, education—in environments that had not been fully secured. It was believed the military was critical to the success of such efforts.

As a result, the role of the military, beyond actual combat, has grown significantly in the past decade, notably in Iraq and Afghanistan. Contributing to this development was Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s determination that the Department of Defense (DOD) dominate all aspects of American activity in those countries. In addition, the Bush administration created the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) for Iraq. Its leader reported to DOD, not to the Department of State, and to the President.

When the CPA was disbanded, the military filled much of the vacuum the CPA left behind. In Iraq, as indeed in Afghanistan, there was a shortfall of competent civilian personnel to carry out the tasks associated with institution-building. In addition, there was a lack of civilian financial resources to contract for these tasks. The result was the government’s default use of the military

and contractors, the latter primarily by DOD, which, unlike other executive branch agencies, had the available resources to hire in large numbers. Indeed, by 2010 the number of contractors in the two combat theaters exceeded that for military and civilian personnel combined.

With the withdrawal of troops from Iraq, and as the military gets cut back due to budget reductions arising from the current deficit/debt crisis, at issue is whether it can or should continue to pursue what in many cases are non-military tasks, and if so, what other roles and missions it might have to forgo.

In light of these prefatory observations, following are five observations on the do’s and don’ts of state-building, based on personal experience as Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) and DOD Civilian Coordinator for Afghanistan from 2001 to 2004 and again as a Commissioner on the Commission on Wartime Contracting since 2008.

First, *if the United States is to engage in state-building, it should not do so alone.* The United States does not need to lead international reconstruction and stabilization efforts. Indeed, when it comes to nonmilitary activities, Europeans, Australians, and others seem to do better at reconstruction and stabilization than Americans. This was the case with European leadership in the Balkans and Australian leadership in Papua New Guinea.

Furthermore, the United Nations (UN) provides important cover for international participation. Many states simply will not participate in, or contribute to, reconstruction and stabilization efforts without a clear UN mandate. This proved to be the case when the United States sought the contribution of troops from India, Pakistan, and various Latin American and Arab states to augment coalition forces in Iraq.

Finally, Muslim states, notably Turkey, appear to have had considerable success



Czech Provincial Reconstruction Team

Afghan students, formerly taught outside, sit indoors at new desks in Czech PRT-built Pole Qandahari School in Logar Province

undertaking reconstruction and stabilization missions in other Muslim states such as Afghanistan. They seem to suffer less from insurgent attacks than do European and American forces and even nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Second, *we cannot skimp on resources in the early stages of state-building, nor should we flood a country with resources beyond its capacity to absorb them.* The United States did both in Afghanistan. Due in large measure to the mean-spiritedness of some senior officials in the Office of Management and Budget, the United States systematically underfunded Afghan reconstruction and stabilization in the aftermath of the 2001–2002 military operations. For example, the fiscal year 2003 budget, which went into effect in October 2002, totaled only \$981.8 million. The following year's supplemental request for fiscal year 2004 was for a mere \$800 million, while the same request allotted \$983 million for the CPA's back office operations. It was only through congressional intervention that the final supplemental allocation for Afghanistan totaled \$1.2 billion. Indeed, it was only in fiscal year 2004 that total U.S. spending on Afghanistan first passed the \$2 billion mark (\$2.4 billion).

On the other hand, by fiscal year 2010, the United States was spending over \$9 billion just to train Afghan security forces, and total American spending to assist Afghanistan exceeded \$14.6 billion, of which State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) contributed \$4.2 billion. Yet Afghanistan's gross domestic product (GDP) the following fiscal year was only about \$16 billion, so that assistance alone nearly doubled Afghanistan's GDP.

Had we put more money into Afghanistan in the early years of the past decade, we would not be fighting today. The country was peaceful in 2002–2004: people were optimistic and cooperative, refugees returned in the millions, and small businesses were starting up. By flooding the country with money today,

we are exacerbating corruption and helping to fund the insurgents. It is currently estimated that insurgents have extorted about \$350 million from American subcontractors; this sum is second only to drug money as a source of insurgent financing.

Third, *if we wish to engage in state-building again, we must rebuild our civilian capacity to do so.* We cannot fight wars when we draw upon the resources of only one or two agencies. Nor can we do so only with civilian volunteers who may not have the appropriate training for the tasks they are assigned to in theater. For example, the Department of Agriculture was unable to fill all the personnel slots allotted to it. Those persons who did deploy came from the Foreign Agricultural Service and had little knowledge about actual farming conditions in Afghanistan.

**had we put more money into Afghanistan in the early years of the past decade, we would not be fighting today**

Moreover, it is a mistake to default to contractors for work that civilians need to do. In some cases, contractors may simply be inappropriate (for example, personal security details in dangerous war zones). In other cases, their activities may lead to waste if insufficiently or improperly supervised. And contractors tend to be more prone to fraud than civil servants.

The limited success of the Department of State's Civilian Response Corps illustrates the need for a totally different approach to deploying civil servants for reconstruction and stabilization missions. What is required is a commitment from the White House, legislation and funding from Congress, and the ability to mandate that selected civilian personnel in DOD, State, and USAID are properly trained and then mandated to serve overseas just as military personnel do.

In addition, the U.S. Government needs to have the resources to supervise contractors and to undertake certain tasks itself. These include:

- ❖ a permanent inspector general for contingency contracting
- ❖ a dual-hatted top official at both the National Security Council and the Office of Management and Budget to coordinate the interagency implementation of contingency activities and to ensure that these implementation efforts are fully budgeted
- ❖ senior-level officials in DOD, State, and USAID for contingency contracting, including the establishment of a J10 office on the Joint Staff
- ❖ a deployable and expandable cadre of management and acquisition personnel to structure, manage, and oversee contractors
- ❖ planning for contractors as part of the overall deployable force.

In addition, the government should train and have ready to deploy civilians who can assist in many aspects of state-building that might be required in the aftermath of a conflict. These would be not only DOD, State, or USAID civilians, but also those from Justice, Agriculture, and other agencies who might contribute to a state's reconstruction.

USAID in particular has a critical role in this regard. USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah is working mightily to overhaul his agency's culture, which is keyed to long-term, multidecade development and has not responded well to the shorter-term demands of reconstruction. One approach to address this concern would be to expand USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives

(OTI), which currently has a handful of government personnel, the rest being individuals under contract. OTI actually is akin to what DOD special operations forces (SOF) once were: both small and outside the main organizational culture. An expanded OTI should be modeled after SOF, offering a career path to the top for bright, motivated people who are prepared to work alongside the military on hazardous short-term reconstruction projects.

Fourth, *we should limit the military's, and DOD's, role in state-building.* The presence of military people and their equipment can undermine the objective of the nonmilitary work in which they plan to engage. It is exceedingly disconcerting for villagers anticipating a reconstruction project to have Bradley Armored Personnel Carriers roll into their village to undertake that project. Moreover, military personnel rarely have the cultural or linguistic skills to interface with locals. Translators are not always effective; there are many horror stories about translators who do not understand dialects and freelance their translations. Although the military argues that the situation is getting better, “getting better” in this case is not good enough.

The overlap between military and civilian activities is often uncoordinated and wasteful. The military often has difficulties with NGOs, which are suspicious of its culture. Government civilians seem to get better results working with NGOs, who are often funded by civilian agencies, notably USAID.

A prime example of how military activities should be limited is the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP), which began as a brilliant idea in both Iraq and Afghanistan. It enabled lieutenant colonels and colonels to support local projects with walking-around cash of \$50,000 to \$100,000. But CERP grew to encompass million-dollar

projects. Many of these projects duplicated, or even undermined, efforts by USAID. The size of these projects meant that they were insufficiently supervised, with waste as a result.

Congress has put limitations on CERP, but it should be ratcheted back to its original levels: no more than \$100,000 should be expended on any one project. Anything larger should be undertaken by civilians. If the security situation prevents civilians from taking on a project, the effort should not be handed to contractors. It should not be undertaken at all until the environment is more receptive to civilian work.

**the overlap between military and civilian activities is often uncoordinated and wasteful**

It is not enough to say that a task is “not inherently governmental” and therefore is permissible for contractors to carry out. The Commission on Wartime Contracting has pointed out that what matters is risk, and therefore the environment should determine whether contractors can be used at all, even if they do not cross the inherently governmental line.

All of the forgoing observations point to a more limited role for the military in state-building that would enable it to meet its other demands in an era of far more restricted budgets. There are many activities that only the military can undertake—to include humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, such as the tsunami that hit Japan in 2011—apart from the obvious one of fighting wars. The military should be enabled to carry out these other functions to the maximum extent possible.

Finally, *American programs should be sustainable.* The Commission on Wartime Contracting issued a special report that furnished example

after example of facilities that are unlikely to be sustained by the host governments in Iraq and Afghanistan. These include:

- ❖ 133 primary health care centers in Iraq that the government cannot sustain
- ❖ a major unused correctional facility (Khan Bani Sa'ad) in Diyala Province that Iraqis do not want
- ❖ a water treatment plant in Nasiriyah that only 14 percent of Iraqis use because the quality of the water is so poor
- ❖ schools and clinics in Afghanistan that do not have teachers, supplies, or security (in contrast to schools supported by the Czech Provincial Reconstruction Team, which are not built unless teachers are available from the outset)
- ❖ security force training that the Afghan government cannot fund on its own since the cost of training, which has risen to over \$10 billion, is more than five times the government's total revenues.

In conclusion, it is highly questionable, given America's record, whether it should seek to take the lead in postconflict reconstruction and stabilization. That is not to say that the United States should not play an important role in those efforts, only that its resources could be commanded by others—the UN, or Europeans, or Australians, to name the most obvious candidates.

In any case, America should not skimp on resources in the early days of reconstruction; costs rise astronomically over time due to local conditions that can get out of control, as they did in Afghanistan and Iraq and, arguably, in Somalia in the 1990s.

The military should not be America's primary resource for reconstruction. Nor should it be contractors. The key actors should be government civilians from every agency that might have a role, ranging from DOD to Agriculture. Civilians should do some of the work themselves. They should ensure that the military's efforts do not overlap with theirs. They should coordinate with NGOs, which are typically uncomfortable with the military. They should maintain close oversight over the work of contractors, ensuring that the only tasks contracted out are those not excessively risky, whether due to security, incidence of corruption and bribery, or some other factor.

Finally, any effort the United States undertakes—in conjunction with other states and certainly on its own—should be sustainable in the long run. American taxpayers simply cannot afford to tolerate waste, much less fraud. The opportunity cost of waste, fraud, and excessive use of the military is simply too high.

The debate regarding the value of U.S.-led state-building operations is far from resolved and will likely continue for years to come. Nevertheless, just as it is impossible to foresee future contingencies, it is equally difficult to discount the likelihood that the requirement for reconstruction and stabilization might emerge again. It has arisen often enough in the past two decades to justify the need for the U.S. Government to have a coherent approach to state-building, one that provides the appropriate resources, personnel, and management to the task. Our taxpayers, and our troops, deserve nothing less. **PRISM**



U.S. Air Force (Rasheen A. Douglas)



Wall is breached in Hyderabad, Afghanistan, as part of Operation Riverdance, helping villagers defend against Taliban attacks

# Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police

BY ROBERT HULSLANDER AND JAKE SPIVEY

This article examines the security and stability programs known as Village Stability Operations (VSO) and Afghan Local Police (ALP). Created through the combined efforts of the U.S. military, other U.S. Government departments and agencies, and the Afghan government, VSO/ALP enhanced security, governance, and development in strategically important rural areas critical to the Afghanistan campaign but beyond the effective reach of the Afghan government and U.S. conventional forces. VSO/ALP attempts to link and effectively balance centralized and decentralized authority by bolstering traditional governance mechanisms. The

Robert Hulslander and Jake Spivey are Military Analysts in the Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis Division of the Joint Staff.

program was designed to mitigate shortcomings in Afghan governance and security capability and capability, while “buying time” for those capabilities to mature. Although the program’s official inception was in August 2010, its roots go back to earlier efforts that served as the basis of the current initiative. Ultimately, VSO/ALP aims to provide a framework through which the Afghan government can strengthen its relationship with its citizens and wrest control and influence away from the Taliban, other insurgents, and criminal networks.

**while VSO/ALP is a task that may not be defined as unconventional warfare, it is clearly an unconventional approach that is within the traditional purview of special operations forces**

Evidence suggests that VSO/ALP has had positive effects; however, there are challenges related to the future of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and with the program post-2014. Among these challenges are the emerging requirement for conventional forces to conduct highly nuanced foreign internal defense (FID) missions (such as VSO/ALP), for which they are mostly untrained and unprepared; continued assistance to the Afghan government that emphasizes building its credibility and popular support with the people; and ensuring U.S. organizations that remain in Afghanistan as part of a post-2014 theater security cooperation agreement are appropriately structured to leverage the expertise and collaboration built through VSO/ALP relationships. This article offers an opportunity to examine the value of VSO/ALP as a component of the overall strategy in Afghanistan.

## Background

The VSO/ALP program was created through the collective efforts of Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A), Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A), U.S. Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR-A), other U.S. departments and agencies, and the Afghan government. For a number of reasons, CFSOCC-A has the lead for the VSO/ALP mission and serves as the executive agent for its implementation.

First, while VSO/ALP is a task that may not be defined as unconventional warfare, it is clearly an unconventional approach that is within the traditional purview of special operations forces (SOF). Second, CFSOCC-A can be viewed as a strategic headquarters for SOF in Afghanistan. Its proximity to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) headquarters in Kabul facilitates close collaboration with the ISAF commander and ensures a consistent vision between the two headquarters relative to campaign plan goals and objectives. Third, CFSOCC-A drew on historical lessons and studies of other similar initiatives conducted elsewhere, the majority of which were FID missions containing elements of unconventional warfare conducted by SOF. VSO/ALP has its roots in earlier, rural Afghanistan initiatives undertaken by SOF and/or CJSOTF-A long before the program was jointly approved and officially sanctioned by the Afghan government. As early as 2005, well before the establishment of CFSOCC-A, CJSOTF-A undertook initiatives in Uruzgan Province aimed at strengthening local community efforts to resist the Taliban and tie those efforts to aspects of governance and economic development. However, lacking adequate support, those efforts were unsustainable. With the return in 2006 and 2007 of



former CJSOTF-A leaders, the concept was revitalized. One officer described the process:

*We established the Afghan Auxiliary Police program with [Dutch army general officer, ISAF commander in Southern Afghanistan] blessing. Tribal elders, police chiefs and the [Kandahar governor] worked with us to vet these folks. . . . The CJSOTF-A commander at that time . . . helped us lobby for support. We worked with the governor . . . to build line ministerial capacities and [U.S. Agency for International Development] embedded in our headquarters to marry development at the local level with security we were creating by our guys living and operating in these remote areas. We integrated [the Department of State] into the effort to assist in influencing governance appointments at the district and provincial level. [The CJSOTF-A battalion commander] leveraged influence with the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and U.S.] chains of command accordingly and we were able to get additional inter-agency funding for the effort. . . . But again, lacking a viable collective-governing strategy country-wide, and because everyone in Kabul remained focused on a top-down approach, it ultimately fell apart.<sup>1</sup>*

These and other early initiatives were led by CJSOTF-A, at the time the highest level SOF headquarters for such missions. CJSOTF-A is an O6-level command located in Bagram; ISAF headquarters, the U.S. Embassy, and Afghan government ministries are all located in Kabul. The lack of a strategic-level SOF headquarters in Kabul was at least one factor why early VSO-like efforts were unsustainable.

The SOF community recognized the need for a higher level headquarters that could better align its strategic efforts with ISAF and the Afghan government. Such a construct would eventually become a reality in late 2008 with the establishment of CFSOCC-A in Kabul.

Brigadier General Edward Reeder, USA, the first commander of CFSOCC-A and a previous commander of CJSOTF-A, organized the new headquarters to support the ISAF commander and ISAF Joint Command commander in order to nest SOF activities into the ISAF counterinsurgency strategy and ISAF Joint Command operational plan. CFSOCC-A was appropriately positioned to provide expertise to ISAF and the Afghan government on implementation of what would eventually become VSO/ALP. CFSOCC-A would also provide strategic guidance and greatly enhanced support to CJSOTF-A operational/tactical activities.

Capitalizing on this new organization and building on previous CJSOTF-A experience, the Afghan Public Protection Program, a precursor to VSO/ALP, was initiated in Wardak Province to counter Taliban control. Owing to the inability of the Afghan government or ISAF to provide security for remote villages and districts, local defense forces were established under the Afghan Public Protection Program that sought to emulate historically recognized, autonomous approaches to security:

*Zahir Shah (~1948–1978) supported village-level defense forces called “arbakai” to establish order in eastern Afghanistan. These village-level forces were used for defensive purposes and organized under the auspices of legitimate tribal institutions. But, the result was clear: law and order were established by locals, not the central government.<sup>2</sup>*

The first of these defense forces had been established under the auspices of *malik* (local strongmen). Traditional tribal leadership that had provided direction and control of the historically viable *arbakai* was badly damaged by years of violence and intimidation or in some cases was nonexistent. The result was a general lack of integrity and accountability to both local communities and the central government.

Ultimately, a construct had to be developed that placed the central government in the forefront, while taking into account the culture and traditions of the Afghan people. General Reeder challenged his staff to design a program that would reflect a range of historical lessons and the unique context of Afghanistan. Largely influenced by Seth Jones, the result was the Community Defense Initiative, later known as the Local Defense Initiative.

a construct had to be developed that placed the central government in the forefront, while taking into account the culture and traditions of the Afghan people

Between early 2009 and the spring of 2010, experiences from the field continued to provide an evolving proof of concept for the program refinements required for success. Not only did the Afghan forces have to be locally raised, but they also needed to *stay* local. Recruits had to be vetted and required proper training, oversight, and, most important, accountability to the central government. Also clear was that while the initial tie between local and central governments was focused on security, it would be more important in the long run to reinvigorate traditional governance structures and foster economic development damaged by years of conflict and

criminal and insurgent repression. According to Shahmahmood Miakhel, “Historically, Afghanistan had always had a weak central government but it has developed a strong district level structure. In the past, successful central rulers have worked with tribal and religious leaders to achieve balance through compromise.”<sup>3</sup>

These program refinements were occurring when Brigadier General Austin “Scott” Miller, USA, assumed command of CFSOCC-A in early 2010. Under his auspices, the program continued to evolve, yet it was still not officially sanctioned by the Afghan government. Working with then ISAF Commander General Stanley McChrystal, the Afghan Public Protection Force–Village Stability program concept was approved. In the following months, in consultation with Afghan government officials and with the support of the new ISAF commander, General David Petraeus, the program became the present day VSO/ALP. To obtain buy-in from the Afghan government, the provision was made that all local security forces, thereafter known as the ALP, would be wholly subject to Afghan authority through the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) and answerable to their respective district chief of police. Equal emphasis was placed on facilitating the U.S. and Afghan whole-of-government approaches to empower local governance and further economic development to enhance community self-determination. Furthermore, this provided the Afghan government opportunities to strengthen valuable connections with the populace and expand influence to areas where it was previously impossible.

### Construct

The VSO/ALP program works within the framework of counterinsurgency operations and consists of three pillars: establishing and

## VILLAGE STABILITY OPERATIONS AND AFGHAN LOCAL POLICE

maintaining security, developing and/or reinvigorating traditional governance structures, and providing the basis and opportunities for economic development. VSO/ALP relies on U.S. SOF and select conventional force teams to establish trust-based relationships and then work and live with villagers in strategically important rural areas. The CJSOTF-A is responsible for implementing VSO/ALP at the operational level country-wide.

The SOF teams directly responsible for the conduct of VSO/ALP at the tactical level (village/district/region) nominally consist of Army, Navy, Marine, and Air Force special operators and may include civil affairs teams, cultural support teams, and/or female engagement teams. The exact composition of each team is mission-dependent and its disposition typically falls under a regional special operations task force subordinate to CJSOTF-A.

SOF presence in the village and its integrated activities with village/district leadership form a platform from which all actions to facilitate improved security, governance, and development are initiated. This combination of the team's presence and actions is frequently referred to as a village stability platform (VSP). This platform is in turn supported by a robust collaboration network referred to as Village Stability Coordination Centers that collocate with select district and province augmentation teams to integrate interagency involvement. Each regionally aligned Village Stability Coordination Center is staffed and resourced by CFSOCC-A and CJSOTF-A personnel who act as coordinators, problem-solvers, and facilitators for all VSP activities from the village and district through national levels. As one analyst noted, "If one were to compare all the VSPs to a physical body, then the CFSOCC-A elements that comprise the

coordination network represent the central nervous system."<sup>4</sup>

The VSP employs an integrated, bottom-up approach focusing efforts at the local level to enable communities to defend themselves, empower them to make decisions affecting their present and future, and foster enhanced connections to the Afghan government. The teams establish relationships with communities willing to resist the Taliban and criminal elements. Working with and through local leaders (for example, a village shura), they facilitate the village's security and economic development.

**VSO/ALP villages are generally located in areas regarded as key terrain, possessing one or more strategic characteristics**

CFSOCC-A helps screen, recommend, and select potential VSO/ALP village sites in conjunction with ISAF and the Afghan government. Village selection is based on campaign priorities, extensive intelligence preparation, information from teams in the field, and input from regional command forces. It is also common for villages adjacent to existing VSO/ALP sites to indicate a desire to participate in the program. This is an important criterion for selection—the success of the program depends on a community that is willing to stand up for itself.

VSO/ALP villages are generally located in areas regarded as key terrain, possessing one or more strategic characteristics. Villages may be in or near transportation hubs or significant ground lines of communication, they may support important agricultural or other economic activities, and their tribal and ethnic composition may offer opportunities to leverage

connections in support of ISAF and Afghan government objectives. Areas favored for consideration are often those that demonstrated opposition to the Taliban during its expansion and rule from 1994 to 2001. The nexus of support for any insurgency is the population itself; thus, there is no better place to begin to wrest control of the population away from the enemy than in areas that previously resisted insurgent influence. Finally, villages selected for VSO/ALP must be operationally and logistically supportable for the program to remain viable.

**VSO/ALP concentrates on areas where the government cannot assert its sovereignty and coalition forces cannot provide consistent security**

At its core, VSO/ALP is about community mobilization. While training the local security element (the ALP) and supporting the startup of economic development projects is the responsibility of the VSO team, selecting the ALP and what village projects will be undertaken are decisions made by the local shuras. By supporting and facilitating the community shura, the village begins to support itself and, with the involvement of the embedded teams, begins to build relationships with its district government.

The VSO/ALP program employs a four-phase methodology: shape, hold, build, and transition.

### **Phase 1: Shape**

Across Afghanistan, the lack of effective Afghan government/ISAF presence in many rural areas allows the Taliban, other insurgents, and criminal networks to exert control. VSO/ALP concentrates on these areas where the government cannot assert its sovereignty and coalition forces cannot provide consistent security.

In a counterinsurgency, a certain number of troops are considered necessary to secure a population against insurgents. According to Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, “Most density recommendations fall within a range of 20 to 25 counterinsurgents for every 1,000 residents.”<sup>5</sup> Given that the population of Afghanistan is 30 million, it is easy to recognize the unattainable number of security forces that the coalition would require to secure the population. Additionally, with the current drawdown timeline, the coalition does not have the necessary time to develop (recruit, vet, screen, and train) a qualified Afghan force to the numbers needed. Many coalition partner nations already seek to disengage from Afghanistan and the security needs of the people are immediate. According to John Nagl, it is “perhaps only a slight exaggeration to suggest that, on their own, foreign forces cannot defeat an insurgency; the best they can hope for is to create the conditions that will enable local forces to win it for them.”<sup>6</sup>

VSO/ALP seeks to mitigate these security shortfalls. By mobilizing the population, the immediate security needs of the community can be met. The men who comprise the local force are selected by community leaders; their integrity, loyalty, and commitment to protecting their homes and families are known. Additionally, their behavior and conduct, particularly in the regions where Pashtunwali<sup>7</sup> is influential, tend to adhere to expected standards.

Understanding the human terrain of the village or community is a key factor in determining how to work with the inhabitants. Each village and district is unique and must be approached individually. As previously described, VSO/ALP is village- or community-based, not tribal- or clan-based. Living in or

near the village they support, VSO/ALP teams become aware of the identity of key leaders, rivalries between families and clans, enterprises village leaders may be engaged in, and the influence of illegitimate entities. For this reason, efforts to understand and map such relationships must draw from diverse sources and are enhanced when cultural and anthropological factors are considered. One of the reasons cultural support teams and female engagement teams are routinely relied upon in VSO/ALP is to help provide those insights and leverage that knowledge.

In its initial phases, VSO/ALP focuses on establishing the physical security of the village and developing the partnerships that help ensure its safety and eventual transfer of security responsibilities to the Afghan government. To this end, SOF partner with diverse elements of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to establish long-term relationships between the village and ANSF. The VSO/ALP team may also need to fill interim security gaps by partnering with other coalition force elements whenever feasible.

Of primary importance, SOF will seek to reduce or eliminate any intimidation of the villagers. This may involve unilateral combat operations to drive out Taliban and Taliban sympathizers from the village or area. The team, with ANSF whenever possible, conducts presence patrols to gain information on enemy activity in the area and enhance relations with village inhabitants. Generally, ANSF are well received and residents are more willing to interact with the partnered patrols. As VSO/ALP operations increase and daily contact with the villagers becomes commonplace, the teams are better able to counter Taliban and criminal activity. In some cases, the enemy initially reacts strongly to the VSO/ALP team's efforts, but with time, insurgent activity typically declines. Establishing VSPs in

adjacent villages relieves pressure on supporting units, provides an opportunity to expand and connect security efforts within the district, and offers further development opportunities for each community by denying insurgents unrestricted access to an area.

**security of the population underlies everything; without it, efforts to move governance and development forward will fail**

By focusing on a village or group of villages beyond the effective reach of ISAF or ANSF, VSO/ALP enables a stable environment. The security of the population underlies everything; without it, efforts to move governance and development forward will fail.

### Phase 2: Hold

The ALP is staffed by the village's own people; it is an Afghan government-sanctioned MOI initiative and is defensive in nature. The ALP is intended to be a temporary (2–5 years), village-focused program in areas with limited or no ANSF presence. The ALP provides security to communities where Afghan government cannot directly provide it and, importantly, buys time for ANSF capacity to grow:

*The coalition and [Afghan government] have neither the time nor the resources to secure the most relevant and threatened segments of the population by using only coalition and [government] resources. This has led to a shifting in ISAF's campaign plan from operations almost exclusively designed to protect the population to operations designed to enable the population to protect itself.<sup>8</sup>*





ALP relies on and uses village inhabitants, people who have a vested interest in defending their community and who reject the fear and intimidation imposed by the Taliban. The process of establishing a village ALP force begins with the village elders (normally, those comprising the shura) nominating prospective recruits. CFSOCC-A, in conjunction with the MOI, established a planning figure of 30 ALP per village and 300 ALP per district as a guide for recruitment.

The MOI vets and biometrically screens potential ALP recruits through the Afghan National Directorate of Security to uncover criminals or insurgents. If no obstacles to selection are encountered, the recruits are enrolled in the program. The U.S. Government funds ALP salaries, acquisition of weapons, and ammunition through a combination of resources, primarily the Afghan Security Forces Fund administered by the MOI. The MOI distributes registered weapons and ammunition to the ALP and pays their salaries. CFSOCC-A describes the ALP approval process:

*Once the decision is made between district, provincial, and village leadership to establish an ALP program, a tashkil approval must be requested from the Ministry of Interior. A tashkil is an organizational document, similar to a U.S. Army [Modified Table of Organization and Equipment], which dictates force structure, personnel end strength, command relationships, unit/staff functions, and mission descriptions. The embedded SOF team will assist the district leadership in submitting a request through the provincial chief of police and governor for submission as a formal nomination to the MOI. In parallel to this effort, the SOF team will submit the nomination up their chain of command to CFSOCC-A and on to [NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan/Combined Security Training Command–Afghanistan] for processing.<sup>9</sup>*

## VILLAGE STABILITY OPERATIONS AND AFGHAN LOCAL POLICE

After approval, SOF VSO teams provide a 3-week period of instruction for the new ALP recruits, focusing on basic combat skills, rifle marksmanship, communications, first aid, improvised explosive device detection, checkpoint procedures, and search and detention procedures. Additionally, Afghan-specific core classes are taught, including rule of law, human rights, use of force, ethics, morals and values, police policy, and the Afghan constitution. Upon completion of the course, the new recruits participate in combined activities with coalition forces and/or ANSF elements operating in or near their area. Following these partnered evolutions, and as the ALP become more experienced, they then report and answer to the district chief of police for community policing assignments. While ALP do receive rudimentary police training, they have no arrest authority and are focused on community defense. They can detain individuals temporarily, but must turn them over to the police chief for resolution:

*When the first VSP was established . . . local nationals fled the area anticipating an attack by local insurgents. However, within four months, the village's elder informed the [coalition forces] almost all of the local nationals had returned because of the improved security. The added security within the village allowed [the Afghan government/coalition forces] to hold development shuras, which helped the locals, creating a process for approving projects and hiring local builders. As a result, multiple small community projects evolved, including refurbishing a local school and projects to redirect water through the village. Improved atmospherics resulted in better communications between locals and [coalition forces], mostly through*

*tips on [improvised explosive device] locations and potential future insurgent attacks. Due to the diminished influence by insurgents in the greater operational area around the village, [coalition forces] are attempting to establish ALP programs in selected adjacent villages to further stabilize security. The presence of the VSP in the village helped elders engage with [the Afghan government], resulting in improved ALP recruitment.<sup>10</sup>*

SOF VSO teams seek to partner ALP units from their inception, with other elements of the ANSF operating locally. This typically includes elements of the Afghan National Police and/or Afghan National Army. Because FID partnerships among U.S. SOF, Afghan army commandos, and ANA special forces are strong, building ALP partnerships with those elements is fairly common and preferred. The Afghan special forces are similar to and have been trained extensively by U.S. Army Special Forces, and their training in unconventional approaches imparts a greater understanding of the value of the VSO/ALP program, making them among the most qualified partners to take responsibility for the program as it transitions to an Afghan lead.

For the short term, ALP provides a credible and capable defensive security force proficient enough to conduct partnered “hold” operations in and around their respective villages. For the midterm, ALP forces are expected to be able to independently defend their communities against resurgent Taliban or other insurgent/criminal activity. For the long term, it is planned that ALP forces will be assimilated into one or more elements of the Afghan special forces, although this process will happen on a case-by-case basis as decided by the Afghan government.

Not every VSO site has a dedicated ALP element. As General Miller emphasized, “You



can do VSO without ALP, but you can't do ALP without VSO."<sup>11</sup> His observation acknowledged that while security was of primary importance, what made the program of real, lasting value to the Afghan government was fostering good governance and economic development. VSO helps the government make these connections with the people and emphasizes its value. Where ISAF or ANSF are present and provide the requisite security, standing up an ALP unit may not be required. Regardless, the other two pillars of the VSO program, governance and economic development, are of critical importance and are continually emphasized.

**earlier Afghan stability programs struggled to be successful because they often lacked one or more key components found in the current VSO/ALP program**

### Phase 3: Build

Once security is established and the Taliban or other insurgent or criminal influence is diminished, VSO/ALP moves to its build phase. Earlier Afghan stability programs struggled to be successful because they often lacked one or more key components found in the current VSO/ALP program. For example, local security forces did not equitably represent community demographics, were not answerable to the central government, lacked procedures to choose and vet recruits, and did not empower local, traditional governance structures.

Additionally, building the relationships and facilitating collaboration between U.S. interagency activities to make development and governance aspects of the program successful had yet to mature. The design and

implementation of the current program relied heavily on establishing and maintaining meaningful relationships between the Afghan people, their government, ISAF, U.S. departments and agencies, and nongovernmental organizations. VSO/ALP efforts to solidify these relationships across all lines of engagement are crucial, serving as building blocks to improvement, expansion, sustainment, and transition.

Key leader engagements by the VSO team support and empower traditional governing bodies. Engagements beyond a village's immediate area of influence are facilitated by the Village Stability Coordination Center. SOF-led Village Stability Coordination Centers operate at the district/regional level and serve as regional platforms for coordination and integration of civil-military planning and collaboration by engaging other government agencies (State, U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of Agriculture, among others) and nongovernmental organizations (for example, Afghan Social Outreach Program, Médecins sans Frontières, and Red Crescent) to provide assistance to the villages. Participation by the interagency and integration of their specific capabilities are essential to tie small-scale, local development projects together with longer term regional efforts. In practice, these efforts have the potential to provide a foundation for future engagement activities.

Empowering local leaders is intended to reinforce the practice of good governance. Villagers have a say in their own destiny, and relationships with the district center and regional center are fostered, connecting the local level to the state from the bottom up. Then, as issues affecting the community are brought to the district and regional centers, the government is provided the opportunity to respond to community needs from the top

down. The government's ability to do so is a challenge, which is a primary reason VSO/ALP and similar programs are important.

The district center is the Afghan government political and economic entity through which goods and services flow. While improving relationships between village leaders and their district governors is intended to generate a better relationship with Kabul, the connection with the nascent national government is tenuous. Effective central governance relies on a number of important variables. Capability and capacity are two that Afghanistan currently lacks. Given the austere and challenging geographic conditions of the country, plus the government's limited reach, the emphasis on a bottom-up, local approach such as VSO/ALP may provide opportunities for success.

### Phase 4: Transition

SOF teams cannot remain in a village or group of villages indefinitely. As villages gain experience and move toward independence from coalition involvement, the SOF element seeks to move on and establish other VSPs. By establishing other sites in the district, VSPs expand what General Petraeus termed the "security bubble." This is akin to other historically similar concepts such as the "oil spot" or "ink blot" theories of expanding secure areas in a counterinsurgency.<sup>12</sup>

The ultimate goal of the VSO/ALP program is to turn responsibility for each VSO/ALP site over to complete Afghan control. This transition has already begun, with multiple sites now under the control of the central government. All extant sites are anticipated to have completed this transition by the end of 2014. Transition involves a maturation process. Interim stages require proper oversight and support to ensure that the transition proceeds smoothly and according to plan. In some cases, the SOF team may be reduced and

the site augmented by U.S. conventional forces who have received specialized training to assume the VSO/ALP mission. To enable this, in 2011 General Petraeus placed two separate conventional force units under the operational control of CFSOCC-A to support and supplement VSO/ALP efforts. Working in platoon- and squad-sized elements, the conventional forces were integrated with SOF teams conducting VSO/ALP. Like the SOF teams before them, the conventional forces trained to continue the relationships established with their ALP, ANSF, and interagency development partners.

**the ultimate goal of the VSO/ALP program is to turn responsibility for each VSO/ALP site over to complete Afghan control**

This "thickening of the force" concept was the first step in training conventional force elements to play a larger role in VSO/ALP. It provided CFSOCC-A and CJSOTF-A additional capacity to establish new VSP sites in accordance with ISAF commander/Afghan government desires to expand the program without risking failure in existing sites. A limited number of SOF (referred to as a "tether") typically remain with the new conventional force team while the rest of the SOF team moves on to establish a new VSP. At the point where the conventional force team is deemed capable of providing unilateral overwatch and support to the VSP, the tether will rejoin its original team.

### Challenges

The SOF and conventional forces partnership has proven to be successful, but FID is not a habitual conventional mission, and missions such as VSO/ALP are nuanced, requiring

a high degree of individual Servicemember maturity and experience. Longer term aspects of governance and development associated with VSO/ALP and similar FID-like programs rely on familiarity with and understanding of interagency and nongovernmental organization capabilities. SOF typically has a greater experience than conventional forces in working with diverse interagency partners on the ground. However, if the trend of increased reliance on conventional forces persists, preparing select numbers to assume greater roles in such missions implies the individual Services and even the U.S. interagency will have to address other doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel, and facilities considerations to ensure success.

**weak linkage between Afghan citizens and their newly formed republic provides opportunities for insurgents and criminal elements to flourish in the provinces and villages**

Even with the relative success VSO/ALP seems to be having, providing security, governance, and development to Afghan villages faces longstanding challenges. After nearly 40 years of armed conflict, overall lack of development and economic opportunities affect the populace in multiple ways. The weak linkage between Afghan citizens and their newly formed republic, buttressed by a historical lack of trust of central government, provides opportunities for insurgents and criminal elements to flourish in the provinces and villages.

Another challenge lies with sanctioned local forces not adhering to the highest standards of conduct while attempting to create more secure environments. This leads to

magnification of concerns about VSO/ALP: “Many remain deeply opposed, including Oxfam and other aid groups that described the local police program in a May report as lacking sufficient oversight and responsible for ‘communities living in fear of government-supported community defense initiatives they see as criminal gangs.’”<sup>13</sup>

It is difficult to ensure complete integrity of local defense forces even among those with established VSPs. When ALP corruption or poor performance is discovered or reported, a concerted effort to investigate allegations, correct problems, and demonstrate transparency is important to ensuring the integrity of the ALP program. In addition, it is critical to distinguish ALP from Afghan independent militias in the minds of Afghan citizens:

*Government officials seeking to break up hundreds of small independent militias in the volatile northern province of Kunduz have ordered more than 4,000 members to surrender their weapons within 20 days or face a military crackdown. . . . The [unsanctioned] militias in many cases piggybacked on an officially sanctioned American-financed program to recruit local men for police patrols to fight off the Taliban, an effort that has been tried in other parts of the country with varying degrees of success.*<sup>14</sup>

As previously noted, the integrity of the ALP is generally less problematic in Pashtun areas and where the Afghan government is responsive to resolving allegations or instances of abuse. Themes imparted through training and example emphasizing integrity and honorable action are aimed at leveraging Afghan sensibilities regarding Pashtunwali and other

## VILLAGE STABILITY OPERATIONS AND AFGHAN LOCAL POLICE

ethical/ behavioral codes. Regardless, providing consistent oversight, mentoring, and monitoring of the ALP is required in order to prevent infrequent lapses from developing into regular patterns of misconduct.

MOI support and direct involvement with VSO/ALP from the onset are essential to bind the traditional local village to the government. More important in the long term, integrity of the relationship between the locals and Kabul depends on the MOI adequately sustaining that oversight and support through transition from ISAF to Afghan control by 2014.

### Conclusion

During his tenure as ISAF commander, General Petraeus referred to VSO/ALP as “a potential game-changer.” While the program has its share of challenges and detractors, it also has a significant base of support within the coalition, government, and people. In response to allegations of ALP abuses, ISAF and the Afghan government have conducted investigations to ascertain the facts and have moved to correct problems that actually existed. Periodic and recurring surveys of conditions at VSO sites that track important trends relating to villagers’ perceptions are continuously analyzed. Focused on important objective areas such as security (including support of ALP), provision of basic services, economic development, and support for the government (both local and national), survey results indicate a slow but steady increase in positive trends where VSO sites have been established. Such positive survey results were a contributing factor to the Afghan government authorizing expansion of the originally approved program.

VSO/ALP is not a panacea for the issues the coalition and the Afghan government must confront. To be sure, even its most ardent supporters will attest to its challenges. The program, having evolved in an iterative fashion, is dynamic, and application at each site is nuanced and unique. Even so, the majority of reporting indicates it has become an important part of the campaign in Afghanistan. At the very least, this implies recognition of the potential value of local initiatives in a society deeply segmented by geography, culture, and traditions. The VSO/ALP bottom-up methodology strengthens relationships and provides the Afghan government and the coalition with new opportunities and welcome connections. Perhaps most important, it appears to have helped wrest control of the population away from the Taliban and criminal networks in key contested areas by facilitating security, governance, and development in a way uniquely adapted to Afghanistan.

How much of a game-changer VSO/ALP turns out to be will not likely be known for some time. This article is based on a snapshot in time and attempts only to impart a general understanding of its principles; it is far from being a definitive assessment of the program. However, VSO/ALP reveals important lessons for counterinsurgency and FID, giving students of both another way to look at current and future possibilities in Afghanistan and elsewhere. **PRISM**

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) J33, Joint Center for Operational Analysis (JCOA), interview by authors, December 16, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Seth Jones, “Going Local: The Key to Afghanistan,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 7, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Shahmahmood Miakhel, “Understanding Afghanistan: The Importance of Tribal Culture and Structure in Security and Governance,” United States Institute of Peace, November 2009, 21.

<sup>4</sup> JCOA analyst observation, June 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, December 2006), paragraphs 1–67.

<sup>6</sup> John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Pashtunwali is an unwritten ethical code and traditional lifestyle that the indigenous Pashtun people from Afghanistan and Pakistan follow. It is a basic common law of the land or “code of life” passed from generation to generation. It guides both individual and communal conduct. Pashtuns embrace an ancient traditional, spiritual, and communal identity tied to this set of moral codes and rules of behavior, as well as to a linear record of history 1,700 years old. Pashtunwali promotes self-respect, independence, justice, hospitality, love, forgiveness, revenge, and tolerance toward all (especially to strangers or guests). It is considered a personal responsibility of every Pashtun to discover and rediscover Pashtunwali’s essence and meaning. See <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pashtunwali#cite\\_note-Banting-3](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pashtunwali#cite_note-Banting-3)>.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph A. L’Etoile, “Transforming the Conflict in Afghanistan, Village Stability Operations/Afghan Local Police and Bottom-up Population Mobilization,” *PRISM* 2, no. 4 (September 2011), 4, available at <[www.ndu.edu/press/transforming-conflict-afghanistan.html](http://www.ndu.edu/press/transforming-conflict-afghanistan.html)>.

<sup>9</sup> Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A) Web site, available at <[www.cfsocca.soccent.centcom.smil.mil/sites/CFSOCC-A/vso/Pages/alprecommend.html](http://www.cfsocca.soccent.centcom.smil.mil/sites/CFSOCC-A/vso/Pages/alprecommend.html)>.

<sup>10</sup> Regional Command Southwest Afghanistan Report, North Atlantic Treaty Organization International Security Assistance Force, November 4, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Brigadier General Austin “Scott” Miller, CFSOCC-A commander, statement at staff meeting, recorded by JCOA representative, March 2011.

<sup>12</sup> The “oil spot” or “ink blot”—its contemporary variety is also known as “clear, hold, build”—is a French idea that can be traced back to the 1890s. See Thomas Rid and Thomas A. Keaney, eds., *Understanding Counterinsurgency: Doctrine, Operations, and Challenges* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Gretal Kovach, “As U.S. Scales Back in Afghanistan, Local Defense Program Expands—Push for Afghan Local Police Proves Controversial,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, August 16, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Ray Rivera, “Afghanistan Seeks to Disband the Independent Militias It Created to Fight the Taliban,” *The New York Times*, August 3, 2011, 9.

# An Interview with Álvaro Uribe Vélez

*When you assumed the presidency in 2002, what was the overall condition of Colombia? Was it a failing state?*

**Uribe:** I never thought that Colombia was a failing state, but during my first month as president, I was surprised by many international analysts. For example, people from the World Bank and other multilateral agencies came to see me saying, “Be careful because Colombia is becoming a failing state.” Colombia has long been a democratic state. The failures of the 1980s and 1990s were not because of our state but because of the advancement of terrorist groups attempting to defeat our democratic institutions in many areas of the country. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Colombia’s traditional political parties—the Colombian Conservative Party and Colombian Liberal Party—came to terms, putting an end to their historic violent confrontation.

During that period, however, [Fidel] Castro’s revolutionary movement in Cuba succeeded, and it chose two countries in which to replicate its revolution: Colombia and Bolivia. The irreconcilable remnant of partisan guerillas in Colombia reinvented themselves as communist guerrillas. Colombia did not have a long period of peace. No sooner had the violent political confrontation ended than the new Marxist guerrillas opened fire. Later, communist violence resulted in the birth and growth of anticommunist self-defense groups.

Both the guerillas and self-defense groups were ultimately co-opted by narcotraffickers. The vast majority of them converted into narcotrafficking mercenaries.

What we found when we assumed the presidency was a country with almost 30,000 homicides per year and with more than 3,000 cases of kidnappings—a country with 56 percent of the population living in poverty, with 16 percent unemployment, and a very low investment rate. This is what we found. But we also found excellent people in Colombia with whom to work.

*When you assumed office, approximately what percentage of Colombia was under the control of the insurgents?*

**Uribe:** I would not say “under control of the insurgents,” but I would say “in anarchy” because of the advancement of violence: two-thirds. The other third was in danger of falling into anarchy.

*What were the root causes of the conflict of the 1980s and 1990s?*

**Uribe:** During that time, the dominant cause was narcotrafficking. I remember the political agitators used to say, “If Colombia widens its democracy, we are going to cease. We are going to stop our cause.” In 1988, our constitution adopted a popular direct election

Álvaro Uribe Vélez was the 58<sup>th</sup> President of Colombia (2002–2010).

of mayors, and later on, the 1991 constitution brought the popular direct election of governors.

In 1994, I was the second governor to be elected in my province of Antioquia. But the question is this: How well did Colombia succeed in widening democracy? Instead of dropping their guns, guerrillas began to threaten mayors, to coerce them, to penetrate mayors' offices and the political system, to rob their wallets. Pablo Escobar even became a member of Colombia's congress, though by the time of my election to the Senate, he had been chucked out by our armed forces.

It's sometimes said about people like Pablo Escobar and other drug kingpins and warlords that they provide social services for the people in their community—public safety, soccer teams, stadiums, and other things that the government doesn't provide. It is an excuse. It is not uncommon that criminals want to legitimize their actions. Many times they do what they think they need to do to win community support. But the vast majority of Colombians have never supported these criminals.

*What was your first priority when you assumed the presidency?*

**Uribe:** Because I was the first president elected with a platform based on establishing security, my pledge to my fellow Colombians was: "If I am elected I will fight day and night, every minute during 24 hours a day, to restore security, but security with democratic values and to promote investment as a source of the resources we need to advance social cohesion."

*Did you attempt at first to negotiate with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia [FARC]? Or had you already made*

*a decision that there was no point in trying to negotiate with the FARC?*

**Uribe:** No. When I was elected, Colombians were already fed up with failing negotiations. I said the only way for me to renew this process is if they would accept one condition: to cease any criminal activity. If they didn't accept this condition and cease all criminal activity, my government couldn't undertake negotiations with them.

*What were the basic principles and objectives of the democratic security policy?*

**Uribe:** In Latin America, there was an idea that any proposal to bolster security was a way to support dictatorships. In Colombia, many politicians were feeble on security. What I proposed was security with democratic values—I call it Democratic Security Policy. But not only security, but security in the company of two other elements: investment promotion and social cohesion. The first principle was security with democratic values. This is security for all Colombians: security without cracking down on freedoms, security with all the respect of a pluralistic society, security for those who support the government as well as those against our government.

*Did you have a timeline?*

**Uribe:** No. Many times I was asked about a timeline, and what I answered was: I cannot promise when we are going to solve this problem. My pledge was that I would devote all my energy day and night to lead this effort.

*How did you reconcile the competing and sometimes conflicting imperatives of human rights and security?*



**Uribe:** Security is a democratic value. There is a strong link between security, democratic institutions, and of course human rights. Security is a prerequisite for the development of resources. This is the link between security, investment, and social cohesion. Coming back to the relationship between security and human rights, I have always said that we need security as the long-term vision for Colombia. In a democratic society such as Colombia, the only way for people to support security in the long term is by making security credible. And credibility depends on effectiveness and transparency. Transparency needs order and respect for human rights. And we did our best to protect human rights and to not sanction any abuse of human rights.

*What was the division of labor between the police and the military?*

**Uribe:** This was quite difficult because the problems were as serious in rural areas as in cities. We couldn't apply a strict division. The original division was for the military to protect our borders and the police to secure our cities. We couldn't stick with this. We had to involve the military in the fight against narco-trafficking, and we had to involve the police in our fight against terrorist groups such as guerrillas and self-defense groups. Regarding the involvement of the military in the fight against narco-trafficking, there have been discussions in Colombia and in Mexico. I have two practical conclusions and one theoretical approach. The practical conclusion is that during the years before Colombia engaged the military, narco-traffickers expanded and finally penetrated some sectors of the military itself. Secondly, attacking the criminal power of narco-trafficking requires the involvement of the

military. My theoretical conclusion is that we were instilled with the belief that the military was created to protect national sovereignty and that the risks are coming from external threats. But the only risk for sovereignty was coming from terror threats—not from distant lands but a domestic threat in the rise of narcoterrorists. Narcoterrorism can be so powerful that it has the ability to undermine the state and to inflict huge damage to our democratic institutions. And when someone undermines the state and damages the institutions, it is the beginning of the destruction of sovereignty. It is important that we think of resorting to the military in order to protect sovereignty, not to think exclusively in terms of external threats. We must think of the necessity to confront domestic threats against sovereignty such as the threat of narco-trafficking, and this led to engaging the military in the war against narco-traffickers.

*Is it fair to say you consider the collusion of narcotics networks with terrorist networks and insurgency networks to be not just a law enforcement problem, but an international security threat?*

**Uribe:** Of course, of course! Weakening institutions could gradually eliminate the state. First, these networks eliminate the supreme power of the state. They then reduce the state to a formal state without the capacity to impose the law. And when you have the formal state without effective powers, the state begins to dissolve.

*Did restoring the police presence throughout the country result in problems within the judicial system, such as having people arrested by the police but not being tried quickly and effectively by the judiciary?*

**Uribe:** Sometimes there were complaints on these cases, but the general outcome of taking the police to every place in Colombia was that we began to restore security. And the more we advanced security, the more autonomy the judges could reestablish in every city, in every place. I have said that our policy got some intangible results and intangible outcomes. Let me mention two. We restored the monopoly of law enforcement to the state. There were self-defense groups that had been created to fight guerrillas. We recovered the state monopoly to fight the guerrillas, as well as self-defense groups—to fight any criminal. Second, we restored the monopoly of justice. Attorneys, judges, and prosecutors had been displaced in many parts of the country, and they had been replaced by eager guerrillas or self-defense groups. With the presence of the police throughout the country, we could restore this key element of the rule of law—the monopoly and administration of justice.

*How did you deal with corruption when you found it in the government?*

**Uribe:** We had a rule. When our government complied with this rule, things were going on fine. When our government did not comply with this rule, things were going on badly. What was the rule? I said: We in government should be the ones who detect corruption, denounce corruption, impose sanctions against corruption, and punish corruption. We cannot wait for the opposition, for the media, to come here to detect corruption and to blame our government. When my administration fully complied with the rule, everything was fine. In cases where corruption was denounced by outsiders, by the media, by the opposition, my administration, instead of accepting the problem, went after the problem and punished those responsible.

*One of the elements of your Democratic Security Policy was to reestablish a strong connection between the population and government. How did you balance the requirements of winning the hearts and minds of the Colombian people with the counternarcotics policies of eradication and criminalization?*

**Uribe:** First, I believe in the necessity of equilibrium between participatory democracy and representative democracy. Representation without participation is without legitimacy. Participation without representation becomes anarchy. Therefore, we need this balance. Second, through sincere participation and sincere dialogue, people become much more confident in their institutions. This permanent dialogue we had with our communities during the 8 years in government brought many positive outcomes. Because of this permanent dialogue, government officials were less likely to make promises but much more committed to look for options. If I go today to any community and I make promises and I have to come back tomorrow without having fulfilled my promises, I will lose credibility. But if we go today to any community and the community requests from us a solution, we in government say, “We cannot. We have not enough resources. We have no legal authorization.” And if we come back to this community in 2 to 3 months and the problem is not resolved yet, the community will ask us, “Please, Mr. President, you said to us that you cannot solve this problem but we need a solution. Look how difficult it is.” Therefore, it makes the government much more committed.

There were some important changes in the mindset of my fellow Colombians. At the beginning, during our first community meetings, people came to our meetings to express their

claims and people were upset and angry. During the 8 years of the administration, people continued coming to file their claims, and people complained because the country was not a paradise. But people did it with hope. The main change in the mindset of my fellow Colombians because of this permanent dialogue was to pass from anger to hope. And when people have hope in their governmental institutions, it is less difficult for the government to fight criminality.

*What role did Plan Colombia play in the improvements in the country's stability and security?*

**Uribe:** It was a very hard time. At the beginning, it was economically important. Nowadays, it is not. While Plan Colombia has a [U.S. Agency for International Development] commitment of something over \$300 million per year, Colombia's security program value is somewhere over \$11 billion each year. But in the year 2000, at the beginning of my administration during the years 2002, 2003, and 2004, it was very important economically. Politically, it has been always important. We received a lot of support, for instance, gathering intelligence. And the United States made two important decisions. I am always grateful that, first, President [George W.] Bush made the decision to reestablish air bridge denial in my country. It was effective for us to track and interdict illicit flights. The second decision made by the United States was to allow various authorities to sell Colombia smart weapons. These led us to a tipping point in our battle against the guerrillas.

*Much of Plan Colombia was military-to-military and law enforcement assistance. Did economic development*

*assistance in Plan Colombia make any significant contribution?*

**Uribe:** No. Although in the narrative of Plan Colombia there were aspects directly going to the economy, solving the problems of impoverished communities was made by the Colombian government. We expanded the chapter of social cohesion. The idea was to interpret security as a source of resources. When we promote investments and provide investors with security, the economy prospers. With prosperity, you can have more resources to increase social cohesion. If at the same time, people perceive that their lives are improving because of the social policies, this chapter of social cohesion becomes a validator for the other two main policies: security and investment. Therefore, security with democratic values, investment, and social cohesion made up what I call the triangle to restore confidence in my country. Security and investment promotion were the means. Social cohesion is the end and validator.

*Can an insurgency be effectively defeated when the insurgents have safe havens in neighboring countries?*

**Uribe:** I don't use the term *insurgency* because insurgency was the word used in Latin American countries to describe left-wing guerrillas fighting against dictators. In Colombia, guerrillas haven't had to fight dictators because, in the last century, Colombia has had continuous democracy with the exception of a 4-year interruption between 1953 and 1957. When communist guerrillas appeared, my country had already long ago restored democracy. Colombia was the most stable democracy in Latin America. This is one reason to make the distinction between Colombian terrorist groups

and insurgents in other countries. And there is another reason. I remember talking with people in El Salvador, specifically with Joaquin Villalobos, former guerrilla leader there. At Oxford University, he told me that Salvadoran guerrillas had decided to join in peace talks with the government for three reasons: first, they were in a military stalemate; second, they had run out of resources because Western European [nongovernmental organizations] no longer sent money to them; and third, the government agreed to introduce democratic reforms. In my country, the government has introduced many democratic reforms as I have already mentioned—direct popular elections of mayors and governors and so forth. Our government promotes the rule of law. These government terrorists may live from extortion, from kidnapping, from illicit drugs. The conjunction, the accumulation of all these factors, creates the idea that they are not insurgents, that they are terrorists.

*Are there specific lessons that those countries can learn from the Colombian experience?*

**Uribe:** The best lesson from Colombia during our 8 years was that we resolutely adopted the decision to defeat terrorism, and we maintained our determination.

*What is the best U.S. strategy to help build strong liberal states in the Americas in your opinion?*

**Uribe:** What is important is the combination of the rule of law, security, necessity to cease all illicit drug commerce, and, of course, advancement of social policies. It is important that the United States helps our countries solve the social problems that lead to drug production. At the same time, the United States can help by interdicting shipments, reducing consumption in the United States, fighting money-laundering in the United States, and confiscating illicit wealth kept in the United States. There are many channels through which the United States can work with great effectiveness in our countries to accomplish these goals, for example with the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank. **PRISM**

# Book Reviews

*Hybrid Warfare and  
Transnational Threats:  
Perspectives for an Era of  
Persistent Conflict*

**Coedited by Paul Brister, William H. Natter III, and Robert R. Tomes  
Council for Emerging National  
Security Affairs, 2011  
318 pp., \$15.00  
ISBN: 978-098382-800-6**

REVIEWED BY JOHN ARQUILLA

There are over 20 armed conflicts under way around the world today—and none of them are straightforward conventional clashes. To be sure, there are recognizable battle lines in some places, such as Somalia, where al-Shabaab fighters contend against central government and intervening foreign forces. But much of the violence there is irregular as well, with hit-and-run raiding, piracy, and acts of outright terrorism forming part of the mix. Such a roiling brew—conventional fighting, guerrilla tactics, terror, and strategic crime—is the prototypical kind of “hybrid war” addressed in this remarkable volume.

The editors and contributors all write with a clear sense of concern, perhaps because of

the perceived need to challenge the still widely held view that warfare has not fundamentally changed—a perspective that is given its due in the book. For all the fairness in their approach, though, the weight of the evidence and argument presented leave the reader in no doubt about the overarching belief that, as Congressman Adam Smith puts it in his thoughtful foreword, “better solutions” are needed. Given the travails of American arms over the past decade—and not forgetting the debacle in Somalia nearly 20 years ago—one can only nod in agreement with the call for improvement and lean forward in anticipation of fresh ideas.

*Hybrid Warfare and Transnational Threats* is replete with new insights into the nature of conflict in our time. The rise of networks and other nonstate actors receives full coverage as a high-priority issue area. As Stephen Biddle and Jeffrey Friedman assert in their chapter on the lessons of the Israeli-Hezbollah war of 2006—a quintessential conflict between a nation and network—the “future of non-state military actors is a central issue for U.S. strategy and defense planning.” Other contributors are just as sensitive to this theme, including Frank Hoffman—one of the “founding fathers” of the hybrid warfare concept. He mines other conflicts for insights and finds some rich veins of ore, as in the Russo-Chechen war of the mid-1990s. Hoffman notes that the “Chechens’ fusion of conventional capabilities, irregular tactics, information operations, and deliberate terrorism makes this case an excellent prototype [of hybrid warfare] against a modern power.”

The mention of information operations in the Chechen case is just a hint of the

John Arquilla is Professor and Chair in the Department of Defense Analysis at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School. He is the author, most recently, of *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits: How Masters of Irregular Warfare Have Shaped Our World* (Ivan R. Dee, 2011).

comprehensive analysis of this subject that comes later in the book. For example, there are useful observations about the skillful Russian use of cyber attacks, in close coordination with conventional and irregular military operations, in the 2008 war with Georgia. In her chapter on cyber warfare, Chris Demchak goes further, making the case that cyberspace-based attacks can create “historically unprecedented advantages.” The virtual domain aside, there is also, in several chapters, close examination of the various “softer” forms of influence operations being used in most of the world’s conflicts most of the time—by all sides.

For all the attention given to analyzing the nature and extent of the hybrid warfare phenomenon, there is also a significant effort to think through the responses the U.S. military ought to make as it traverses the new landscape of conflict. In her chapter, Jackie Sittel keys, among other things, on the “transformation of the services into an agile force,” a concept that has made its way into the new strategy that President Barack Obama rolled out in the Pentagon in January. James Hasik next homes in on the problems posed by our “absurdly long development cycles” and outlines a new approach based on “rapid learning and responsive development.” Daniel Magruder offers a compelling argument for pursuing military organizational redesign along networked lines—with special operations forces serving as exemplars. On this networking theme, Steven Miska rounds out the book’s prescriptive agenda by making the forceful case for including in the mix many key nodes from the nonmilitary departments of government.

There is also considerable examination of American military performance in Iraq and Afghanistan—and, to some extent, British operations in the latter case. Perhaps the most wide-ranging and thought-provoking contribution in this section comes from the eminent military historian Martin van Creveld. His chapter has a kind of haunting quality, placing these wars in a larger, six-decade-long context, and using them to pose the question of whether the leading states really can master the challenges posed by insurgents and terrorists. The answer, as he sees it, is still “blowing in the wind.” For Guermantes Lailari, this “wind” is at the backs of the world’s jihadists, helping to propel them along in the ways of hybrid warfare.

It is against the backdrop of the wide range of topics covered in *Hybrid Warfare and Transnational Threats*—with its far-ranging survey of odd, irregular, and mixed conflicts—that the outlines of the future world are now being sketched. The editors and contributors have convinced me that developing an understanding of hybrid warfare and mastering the challenges it poses are the most important strategic concerns of our time.

But before understanding and mastery comes acceptance of the phenomenon itself. My own experience suggests that acceptance comes slowly. It took nearly 20 years from the time David Ronfeldt and I introduced our concept of cyberwar for the Pentagon to formally declare cyberspace a “warfighting domain” in July 2011. It took 15 years from the time we first asserted that “it takes a network to fight a network” for these words to become widely repeated throughout the military and national security apparatus. In both cases, it seems that these long delays had costly but not grave consequences.

The same is not true of hybrid warfare. Every day the validity of the concept is denied, and understanding and mastery are delayed, is another day that sees the spread of conflict, suffering, and the deaths of countless innocents. So let me wish the editors and contributors to this volume Godspeed—and the same to those who I hope will become a large legion of their readers. **PRISM**

# Book Reviews

*Victory for Hire: Private Security Companies' Impact on Military Effectiveness*

By Molly Dunigan  
Stanford University Press, 2011  
256 pp., \$24.95  
ISBN: 978-080477-459-8

REVIEWED BY T.X. HAMMES

In his January 24, 2011, memorandum entitled “Strategic and Operational Planning for Operational Contract Support (OCS) and Workforce Mix,” Secretary of Defense Robert Gates stated:

*At the height of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, contractor numbers well exceeded the military footprint; a similar situation is occurring in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. I do not expect this to change now or in future contingency operations.*

*Although there is historic precedence for contracted support to our military forces, I am concerned about the risks introduced by our current level of dependency, our future total force mix, and the need to better plan for OCS in the future.*

The memorandum concluded by stating, “The time is now—while the lessons

learned from recent operations are fresh—to institutionalize the changes necessary to influence a cultural shift in how we view, account, and plan for contracted and CEW [Civilian Expeditionary Workforce] support in the contingency environment.”

In short, the Secretary stated that the United States will continue to use contractors as half of any deployed force, so the Defense Department should figure out how to do it right. Molly Dunigan’s *Victory for Hire: Private Security Companies' Impact on Military Effectiveness* is a good place to start. Dunigan is an Associate Political Scientist at RAND and is also author of its study “Hired Guns: Views About Armed Contractors in Operation Iraqi Freedom.”

In *Victory for Hire*, Dunigan set out to achieve two goals. First, she wanted to illustrate the impact that private security companies (PSCs) have on military effectiveness and the probability that a democracy can use them well. Second, she wanted to understand the way differences in structure and identity affect military forces composed of a mix of national militaries and contractors “with an eye to providing policy prescriptions for current U.S. policy.” In doing so, Dunigan first explores the theoretical considerations of democratic states using contractors. She then examines both the positive and negative aspects that affect both the providing state and the receiving state. While Dunigan frames her argument within the literature of international relations, her observations are pointed and have practical impacts. She notes:

- ❖ Private security contractors allow weak state leaders to outsource violence and thus never have to develop a state apparatus. Funding is spent

Dr. T.X. Hammes, a retired U.S. Marine Corps officer, is a Senior Research Fellow in the Center for Strategic Research, Institute for National Strategic Studies, at the National Defense University.



on contractors rather than building state capacity.

- ❖ Strong democratic states can outsource interventions to contractors. This preserves the strong states' own military forces but hinders the prospect of the host nation developing its own security institutions.
- ❖ Contractors allow leaders of strong states to avoid restrictions imposed by either the international community or its own legislative branch (a particular concern to this reviewer).

Dunigan then takes on the issues generated when contractors operate alongside active military forces—operational coordination issues, morale impact of pay differentials, and impact of contractors on the host nation population's perceptions of U.S. forces. Dunigan concludes that PSCs “serve as force multipliers in Iraq and Afghanistan and thus have a beneficial impact on quality [but] they have a negative impact on integration through the structural and identity-based hindrances to their effective coordination.” In particular, she stresses the negative impact that contractor actions have on the perceptions of the population—particularly when the United States is running a population-centric (legitimacy of governance) counterinsurgency campaign.

This reviewer traces this negative impact to three facts. First, the United States does not really know whom it is hiring when it hires contractors. We screen our military personnel carefully before enlistment and then train them for months before deployment. In contrast, except for special programs, we do not screen private security companies except on paper. We have even less knowledge concerning

subcontractors. Yet we authorize these personnel to use deadly force in our name. Second, unless a U.S. Government employee travels with contractors, we do not know what they are doing in the society at hand. Finally, despite not knowing who they are or what they are doing, the United States is held responsible by the host nation population for everything contractors do or fail to do. This third fact is what makes it a strategic level issue. Counterinsurgency is a competition for legitimacy between the government and insurgents. The presence of essentially unaccountable, illegitimate agents directly undercuts that legitimacy.

In the next chapter, Dunigan examines the operational effectiveness of contractors through the lens of four case studies. The first two are cases where private firms have been hired to execute missions in place of military forces: Sandline in Sierra Leone and Military Professional Resources, Inc. (MPRI), in Croatia. The second two examine where U.S. agencies were employed to accomplish somewhat similar tasks: the Lebanese Civil War (1982–1984) and the Iran-Contra Affair. In conclusion, she notes that Sandline was at least as effective in supporting the Sierra Leone government as the U.S. Government was in supporting the Contras in Nicaragua. And MPRI proved as effective as the U.S. military in training forces. Her primary objection was that the use of contractors allowed governments to get around either international sanctions (United Nations arms embargoes in the case of Sierra Leone and Iran) or national laws (the Boland amendment banning support to the Contras).

Next, a brief chapter on the historical use of contractors provides important background for how the state, contracting companies, and individual contractor relationships have changed over time. These examples also show

how they might be shaped in the future. Dunigan makes the point that the presence of contractors can often improve the effectiveness of the force but, at the same time, reduce its legitimacy. Despite the passing of over 600 years since the Italian city states hired mercenaries, the public's perception of contractors as mercenaries remains. The contractors themselves understand this repulsion and argue vehemently that they are PSCs or, at worst, private military companies. Despite their arguments, armed contractors are still widely perceived as mercenaries, and Defense Department planners must understand this. There will be situations where the increase in operational effectiveness may not be worth the negative political impact.

Dunigan closes with six lessons and recommendations for policy and regulatory improvements. The lesson that struck this reviewer as most important was a restatement of an idea from her introduction: "PSCs can be and are indeed used by democratic policymakers—often in a covert fashion—to avoid accountability to the citizenry for the decisions to go to war." In addition to the examples given in her book, it has recently come to light that the United States is using contractors to train African troops in Somalia. The Central Intelligence Agency or Defense Department have traditionally conducted these kinds of missions, and as a result, Congress has developed systems to provide oversight of their activities. However, the contractors in Somalia work for the U.S. State Department. This is another illustration of Dunigan's point that PSCs can avoid accountability—either intentionally or unintentionally.

The author might have added that PSCs can also be used to sustain an unpopular conflict. One has to question whether President George W. Bush could have marshaled the political support needed to surge to 300,000 troops in Iraq, or President Barack Obama to 200,000 troops in Afghanistan, instead of the 150,000 and 100,000 totals used for the respective campaigns. Yet, if one counts contractors, those were the actual peak strengths in Iraq and Afghanistan. Whether it is a good or bad thing that contractors make it politically easier for the United States to enter and sustain wars is certainly an issue that should be debated. But to date, there has been remarkably little discussion of this key aspect of how the United States decides to go to war.

Despite the absence of debate, Secretary Gates stated that contractors in large numbers will be part of U.S. operations. At the same time, he urged caution about the risks involved. Clearly, both policymakers and voters need to understand the implications of contractors more clearly. *Victory for Hire* makes a great primer. **PRISM**