

PRTs in Afghanistan

By Eric Kessler

The United States of America is losing the war in Afghanistan and it is losing because the government refuses to apply lessons that have already been learned at other times in other wars. President Obama recently retold America why the United States is in Afghanistan, in case anybody had forgotten, it is to “disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda.”¹ The reason this mission is so difficult is that al-Qaeda is not a country, it is a stateless group that is agile, adaptable, and in touch with local populations. The war in Afghanistan has turned into a classical insurgency with the United States attempting to prop up the government in Kabul versus the al-Qaeda and Taliban elements opposing this government.²

A whole-of-government approach that incorporates all government agencies is necessary to win this war. Although there have been mild attempts to integrate civilian and military experts and create cooperative bodies, this is not enough. As proof, one needs to look no further than the US death toll which came in at it’s highest in 2008³ and the resurgent Taliban forces which now threaten Pakistan and Afghanistan.⁴

Afghanistan is a counterinsurgency (COIN) operation, which requires overwhelming resources, and a massive level of commitment for decades to come.⁵ Anything less than these modifications to strategy are a waste of US treasure and lives.

¹ Obama, Barack. President of the United States. “Prepared Remarks of President Barack Obama: A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.” March 27, 2009.

² Insurgency is an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict. As defined in US Army Field Manual 3-24. “Counterinsurgency Field Manual.” Pg 2

³ Figures as of March 31, 2008. As reported by icasualties.org. Available at <http://icasualties.org/oef/>

⁴ Obama, Barack. “A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.” March 27, 2009.

⁵ Cohen, Elliot. Interview with Author. Washington DC. 6 May 2009.

The US needs to improve upon four COIN principles in order to regain momentum in Afghanistan. Each principle is supported by specific recommendations

- (1) Counterinsurgents, both Civilian and Military, must gain a better understanding of the local environment in Afghanistan.
 - A. Return personnel on their second deployment to the same province or district where they were before.
 - B. Deploy sufficient civilian staff to cover all responsibilities with properly trained personnel, not military stand-ins.
 - C. Improve rotational handovers by keeping senior personnel in place longer, and creating a classified database of hand-off material.
 - D. State and USAID personnel need to accept more risk and operate in the semi-permissive and non-permissive environments.
 - E. Learn the language
- (2) The US needs to better synchronize its whole of government approach to ensure a unity of effort.
 - A. Create a position for one person who manages the entire COIN effort.
 - B. Place civilians in charge of military personnel and vice versa. With the responsibility to evaluate the performance of subordinate counterparts.
 - C. Maneuver units and PRTs should operate as one.
- (3) The US must plan for a long-term commitment to Afghan development.
 - A. Plan a strategic vision out to 2030.
 - B. Obtain public US public support for a decade long struggle, and stop selling the war as a short-term victory.
 - C. Develop Afghan capabilities under realistic timelines which means decades.
- (4) US COIN operations must reach to the lowest levels of Afghan governance, and those levels need to be supported by competent and well resourced civilian and military personnel.
 - A. Deploy more civilian experts with the necessary skill sets
 - B. Create District level reconstruction teams.
 - C. Synchronize COIN operations from the local level to the national level.

D. Civilian experts need to work amongst the population more frequently.

The first section of this paper provides background information to explain the current US situation. It provides a common understanding of what took place over the previous eight years of fighting. The key questions answered are: why the US did not put more resources into Afghanistan earlier in the war; the purpose and concept behind the PRTs; and lastly, what is the plan for the US surge.

The next section looks at the general principles laid out in the US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual (FM 3-24). Understanding this doctrine provides a plausible path to success. A key assumption in this paper is that this doctrine incorporates relevant lessons from previous COIN operations, and is the best framework forward for defeating the insurgency in Afghanistan.

The third section examines the four core principles outlined above, and how these aspects of COIN doctrine are not being implemented thoroughly enough. In this section each core principle is examined and the specific recommendations are laid out in the context of supporting the core principle.

The last section briefly discusses five external factors that will influence the eventual fate of Afghanistan, but are outside the direct control of US policy maker. The factors are: the opium trade, NATO unity of effort, the economic crisis, the fragility of Pakistan, and the lack of human capital inside Afghanistan. These factors can prove detrimental to the best laid plan, and the US must keep a close eye on them as the war unfolds. Ali Jalali explains these complexities in his own words:

The drivers of instability include insurgency, chronic weakness of the Afghan government and state institutions, exploding drug production, and a weak economy. Uncoordinated military operations by international forces and shifting political dynamics in the region are additional contributing factors. These challenges have

serious implications for stabilization efforts and state-building in Afghanistan.⁶

This paper only focuses on one part of international efforts in Afghanistan, because the strategic variables are so diverse and complex. Here the focus is on the US because it operates in the least permissive areas in Eastern Afghanistan, and has the greatest number of resources at its disposal.⁷ The US can improve its COIN efforts by extracting lessons from its own US Army COIN manual, and applying them to Afghanistan. The other variables which impact the success of the Afghan war require a combination of international and regional politics that is circumstance dependent and incorporate broader international issues. The recommendations in this paper can be implemented by a US administration without going through the maze of international approval.

BACKGROUND/CURRENT OPERATING PROCEDURES

From the beginning the United States did not intend to get deeply involved in Afghanistan. The mission was to defeat the Taliban and al-Qaeda then turn the mission over to NATO and the UN for reconstruction efforts. Both the UN and the US felt that maintaining a “light footprint” was the best way to prevent the international community from being mired down in the local politics and conflict that are Afghanistan. Strategically the US, at the time, was also looking at the larger task of invading Iraq, which would require many more troops. As US Special Forces and the Northern Alliance soldiers quickly defeated the Taliban the international community dived up responsibility for rebuilding the various segments of Afghanistan. The

⁶ Jalali, Ali Ahmad, “Afghanistan: Regaining Momentum.” *Parameters*, Winter 2007-2008, Pg 6.

⁷ The permissiveness of regions in Afghanistan refers to the ability of development workers, NGOs, and other civilian elements to operate freely in a secure environment. A non-permissive environment does not allow for development efforts, as the territory is subject to frequent enemy activity.

most detrimental aspect of the “light footprint” is that it did not provide enough international troops to secure the country.

As the Taliban and al-Qaeda began to counterattack the international actors began to debate whether or not to bring in more forces. The international community, in 2002, decided to use Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) as a way to increase the *presence* of security forces without providing actual security for the citizens of Afghanistan. It was a compromise, in the absence of a robust military deployment the PRTs were created.⁸ The theory was that the PRTs would combine diplomatic, development, and military efforts to project a security presence where the enemy was gaining momentum. PRT commanders were supposed to work with the local governments to ensure that the will of the central government was being implemented down to the lowest levels of governance. The objectives and the end state for PRTs are as follows:

- **Improve stability.** Determine the causes and means of conflict including resource competition, tribal/ethnic clashes, insurgency, criminal elements, and political instability; identify the triggers or opportunities to instigate conflict; determine ways to affect the causes and triggers; identify ways to mitigate or resolve the conflict; increase capacity of civil society and legitimate traditional processes to adjudicate and deter conflict.
- **Increase local institutional capacity.** Build individual, organizational, and structural capacity to provide public safety and basic services; where relevant, tie legitimate informal governance (traditional) leaders to nascent formal government organizations; tie appropriate reconstruction and stability projects to legitimate governing bodies.
- **Facilitate reconstruction activities.** Develop job creation programs for infrastructure activities; provide micro lending as soon as practicable; tie road improvements to commercial as well as political integration; and create value-added facilities to improve agriculture and natural resource capabilities within the local absorptive capacity.
- **Execute a strong strategic communications program.** Expand local information dissemination capacity, especially by local institutions (remember that actions speak louder than words); take advantage of

⁸ Stapleton, Barbara. “The Failure to Bridge the Security Gap: The PRT Plan 2002-2002.” In *Building State and Security in Afghanistan* p. 149

face-to-face communication (where traditional and expected); get provincial leaders and authorities out to see district population and traditional leaders; tie reconstruction activities to legitimate governing bodies.

End State

The end state of a PRT occurs when the host nation's provisions for security and public safety are sufficient to support traditional means of development, and political stability is sustainable after the withdrawal of international forces.⁹

The resources given to achieve these objectives have been very limited. US PRTs generally consist of 80-100 personnel, mostly made up of military personnel. The civilian experts on the PRTs consist of a State Department and a USAID representative who are considered equals with the military commander, but they do not have command authority.¹⁰ This relationship is a cooperative agreement that is very personality dependent. Often times PRTs operate without these personnel because State and USAID lack the staff to provide people for the mission.

The civilian expertise comes with several shortfalls. Often times these personnel are not the senior experts, but they are the younger officers willing to deploy to hostile areas. The civilian personnel lack depth of presence, in that, there is only one representative from any one civilian agency. When this person goes on leave or is sick, there is no one to fill the position. Also, there are no civilian staff personnel to focus on their agency's concerns, it is literally a "one man show." From 2002 until 2008 the US forces and ISAF forces attempted to rebuild Afghanistan using the PRTs at the forefront of the reconstruction effort, and the maneuver elements as the means of engaging the enemy in combat. By 2008 it became readily apparent that this model was failing.

⁹ Center for Army Lessons Learned. "PRT Playbook." No. 07-34. September 2007. P 9.

¹⁰ USDA was the most proactive civilian agency to provide experts to the field, but only did so on a volunteer basis. USDA was never designed to be deployable.

2008 saw the largest number of coalition fatalities in since the invasion: 294.¹¹ This prompted the US and NATO forces to reevaluate their strategy to regain momentum from al-Qaeda and Taliban forces. President Obama has ordered 17,000 additional combat forces to Afghanistan and 4,000 additional trainers. NATO was unwilling to send combat forces, but they did pledge an additional 5,000 troops to help train the Afghan National Army (ANA), and provide security during the elections.¹²

The new US administration published a white paper in March 2009 that explained the new US policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan. This paper highlights the contagion effect the Taliban and al-Qaeda have had on the region. US policy makers now refer to it as the “AfPak” strategy because the Taliban and al-Qaeda elements that threatened Kabul have found a safe haven in Pakistan. Within the past few weeks Taliban forces came within 100km of Islamabad before Pakistan forces engaged them to keep them at bay. This news is relevant because it shows the strength of the Taliban and their ability to survive under the current US strategy.

The political wrangling for more NATO troops revealed that the US cannot rely on additional troops from its allies, and that its own resources are its best hope of defeating the Taliban and al-Qaeda elements that remain. Besides additional troops, the US can fight a smarter counterinsurgency than they have done in the past. The next section lays out the key lessons that the US military has codified in its new counterinsurgency doctrine.

COUNTERINSURGENCY DOCTRINE

The US Army and Marine Corps published an updated counterinsurgency doctrine in 2007 (FM 3-24), which outlines the strategies and techniques necessary to defeat an insurgency

¹¹ Available from <http://www.icasualties.org/oef/>

¹² Chu, Henry. “NATO pledges more troops for Afghanistan, but not combat forces.” Los Angeles Times. April 5, 2009.

like al-Qaeda and Taliban. This manual draws from a wide range of disciplines and professions to compile lessons learned from history and from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was written in response to the military's lack of doctrine in the midst of fighting a counterinsurgency. Many of the core ideas were being implemented on an ad hoc, commander dependent basis, but they were not being implemented in the coordinated and unified manner necessary for victory. FM 3-24 lays out the fundamental principles that the US must follow in order to win in Afghanistan. It is important to keep in mind that this is a military manual that cannot dictate the actions of civilian agencies or personnel, but from it we can learn what these agencies ought to be doing to support the counterinsurgency effort. This section explains four key principles that can be extracted from the US Army's COIN doctrine, and explains them in general terms.

These principles are the focus of this paper, because there has been a general failure to follow them in this war. Also, they can be implemented without international coordination, which so far as been difficult to achieve.

- Counterinsurgents must understand the environment (1-124)
- Unity of effort is essential (1-121)
- Must prepare for a long-term commitment (1-134)
- Empower the Lowest Levels (1-145)

Understanding the Environment

Understanding the environment is complex and difficult, but essential. The field manual mentions such aspects as organization of key groups, relationships and tensions, ideologies that resonate with groups, values, means of communication, and leadership structure.¹³ In order to grasp the local environment US personnel need to spend time in the area, learn the local culture, and be able to communicate in the local language. Afghanistan is a very

¹³ US Army Field Manual 3-24, Paragraph 1-124.

diverse culture, and understanding the environment at the national level does not uncover the local level dynamics. In a country with seven major ethnicities, and three major languages with multiple minor ethnicities and languages, it is critical to know the local environment.¹⁴

Interacting with the locals and maintaining a presence in their villages and districts is the only way to gain this knowledge. Also, maintaining a presence in the village can help dispel rumors about the purpose of the US presence in their country, and help improve the image of the US.

Unity of Effort

Unity of effort ensures that one group's actions do not cancel out the affects of another group's actions. This principle refers to integrating individual agency efforts as well as civilian and military efforts. A single well-integrated civil-military team is the most efficient means of waging an effective counterinsurgency. "In COIN it is always preferred for civilians to perform civilian tasks."¹⁵ Specific civilian expertise is not a standing part of military doctrine. Although, the manual recognizes that in some instances civilian personnel may not be available, so military personnel must be used, but this is the second best option.¹⁶ The US had successful unity of effort across the interagency during Vietnam under a program called CORDS.¹⁷ This program provides a model for current operations in Afghanistan.

Long-term Commitment

As eight years have already proven, there is no quick solution for Afghanistan. The US must commit to a long-term plan that spans decades, not years. It is essential, not only to defeat the enemy, but also to psychologically support the residents. Both words and deeds are constantly needed to reassure the civilian populace that the counterinsurgents have the will to

¹⁴ CIA World Factbook: Afghanistan.

¹⁵ US Army Field Manual 3-24, Paragraph 2-40.

¹⁶ Ibid, 2-42.

¹⁷ US Army Field Manual. Paragraph 2-52.

stay.¹⁸ If the populace perceives the insurgents will win, their support will shift in order to be on the winning side. The long-term commitment to development will also help ensure that the insurgents do not return. There is a critical distinction to be made between a long-term military presence and a long-term US presence.

Political action is more important during COIN operations than military action. In a COIN environment political factors trump military concerns, as long as basic security needs are met to make the environment operational for political action.¹⁹ Political action refers to the whole-of-government approach: Department of State, USAID, Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, the intelligence agencies, and more. It can be said that the military is capable of holding down the insurgents, but the political factors are necessary to turn the tide against the insurgents. Overtime as the violence decreases and the local authorities gain control of their own security there should be a gradual decrease in costly US military operations and an increase in the less costly use of US advisors and development experts.

Empower the Lowest Levels

Empowering lower levels, is critical to winning individual hearts and minds and understanding the local environment. Under this concept “commanders provide subordinates with a mission, their commander’s intent, a concept of operations, and resources adequate to accomplish the mission.”²⁰ The details are left to the subordinates who operate at the local level. This method of command structure is best suited for an environment, like Afghanistan, where

¹⁸ US Army Field Manual. Paragraph 1-134.

¹⁹ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 1964. As quoted in FM 3-24, page 53.

²⁰ US Army Field Manual 3-24, Paragraph 1-145.

local circumstances vary widely from village to village. Centrally commanded orders fail to take into account the local priorities that are important to the local populace.²¹

AFGHANISTAN's COINERINSURGENCY

FM 3-24 is a good way of planning for a generic COIN environment, but the war in Afghanistan began six years before the manual was even published. This section lays out the specifics of Afghanistan, how the actions on the grounds measure up to the principles described above, and what policies the US can adopt to succeed in Afghanistan.

Understanding the Environment

The US has done a decent job of understanding the environment given its initial resources and aims. Within the first several months of the initial invasion the United States capped out its resources and felt secure in their initial victory over al-Qaeda and the Taliban. But, the quick shift in focus to Iraq revealed that there was a true lack of understanding of Afghanistan and its complexities. The US placed their trust in NATO allies, and in the Karzai government while focusing on Iraq

An unidentified PRT member who had spent from March –June 2005 in Paktika Province, and had been there three previous times provides a sense of the progress four years after the initial invasion. His words reflect the lack of resources, to truly develop Afghanistan into a functioning country.

You would need 34 PRTs [per province] to develop it to a meaningful level, to where the villagers had access to fundamental healthcare, where they had a handful of good schools with teachers with more than a sixth grade education. Most districts in Paktika do not contain a high school graduate. Six graders teach first graders, literally. There are 2,600 teachers in Paktika, but only eight have ever been trained as teachers. So, to get these 34 districts and 600,000 people even to a basic baseline level of access to clean drinking water, of access to rudimentary healthcare, of access to education for their children which consisted of a roof over their children's head and

²¹ US Army Field Manual 3-24, 1-146.

a teacher who has a high school education would take a level of effort several orders of magnitude beyond anything that we're doing now.²²

The most striking part of the above description is not the level of need, but the level of resources that this PRT member identified in 2005, four years ago. At another point in his interview he describes what would happen when the provincial governor would visit a district.

They[local Afghans] would say, "You promised us a school" or "You promised us a clinic. Where is it?" This was a litany of complaints. Every speaker that got up from the mayor to the district council to the mullah to the schoolteacher would come to the microphone and proceed to bash the governor and the Karzai government for not delivering whatever it was they said three years ago they were going to deliver.²³

From his description it is possible to see the disconnect between what the locals believe is going to happen, and what the provincial governor is able to deliver. This is the result of not understanding the local grievances, as well as not properly handing off information from one rotation to another.

In order to address these concerns, several improvements can be made to the current system that may enhance the understanding of the environment. First, returning personnel should be sent back to the same district or province to maintain a continuity of effort. At the current time there is no military plan for returning soldiers to the same regions they were before, nor does this exist for returning civilian personnel. Civilians usually vie for "better" districts or positions as advisers in Kabul.²⁴ This throws away critical local knowledge of previous projects, and rotations that can be built upon. It may be necessary to implement an incentive program to get people back to the same region, but local situational knowledge is worth the cost.

Second, besides returning to the same area, senior personnel or personnel in direct contact with local nationals need to stay longer in country. Deployments less than a year, or

²² US Institute For Peace. Oral History Project: Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Interviewee #38, p 12.

²³ Ibid, p 8.

²⁴ Source not disclosed. Interview with the author

deployments with extensive leave options in the middle take away from the understanding of local conditions, and adds to information lost during rotations.²⁵

Third, there must be sufficient civilian staff to cover each other when one person is on leave, or out on a mission. The current situation puts one representative from both USAID, State, and maybe USDA inside a province. As the interviewee above describes, it is unrealistic to have such a small team cover a province the size of Vermont. One development expert in a province cannot hope to gain situational awareness on the local needs, let alone provide adequate oversight on projects. The interviewee described a situation in which due to a lack of supervision a contractor was able to provide substandard construction materials, which resulted in a school collapsing two years after completion.²⁶ Doubling the presence to two civilian experts is a start, but quantity is not as important as coverage. The goal must be adequate professional coverage to do the jobs necessary in the specific province.

The fourth recommendation ties into the third, in that State and USAID workers must accept more risk. These civilians are already used to working in foreign countries under stressful conditions. Some pre-deployment training can allow them to carry weapons for defensive measures, and some unit integration training in-country with their military counterparts is adequate to safeguard them.

Mark Ward, the USAID Director for Pakistan wrote an article in the Washington Post at the end of 2008. He called for this very recommendation to be implemented.

U.S. Agency for International Development, is severely constrained in Afghanistan by security rules that tolerate no risk for our Foreign Service officers. They are rarely allowed outside the fortress-like U.S. Embassy in Kabul. When they get out...they are often surrounded by heavily armed security personnel who make it virtually

²⁵ Source not disclosed. Interview with the author.

²⁶ US Institute For Peace. Oral History Project: Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Interviewee #38, p 17.

impossible to interact with the Afghan people they are helping... I am convinced that [USAID Foreign Service Officers] would accept more (and reasonable) risk with better training and equipment.²⁷

In a comment attached to this article a former USAID foreign service officer wrote about his experience in Vietnam. State and USAID officers use to take risks.

Many USAID officers slept in unguarded rural compounds near the front lines with an M-1 carbine or a Swedish K 9 mm under their beds for “force protection”. If we were short one gunner in a [Helicopter, the USAID officer would take over]. USAID made a difference in rural Vietnam because USAID officers engaged with the locals. USAID and its contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan are unlikely to make much difference when they are locked up in secure compounds in Kabul ...²⁸

The final recommendation is to learn the language. In 2006, a story broke around the world, that after three years in Iraq, only 6 out of the 1000 embassy employees in Baghdad, actually spoke Arabic.²⁹ It is safe to assume that if the US cannot meet the demand for Arabic speakers in Iraq that it is also having equal difficulty meeting the demand for Pashtun speakers in Afghanistan. Remember, Afghanistan is much more linguistically diverse than Iraq.

Language skills are so critical to operations that FM 3-24 dedicated an entire appendix to the interpreter-representative relationship. As one PRT member explains how using local interpreters can result in lost information:

You need officers who can speak the language. At best, you get 75% of the idea across through an interpreter in one direction and 75% back in the other direction, which means interpretation is costing you 50% of every message in the best scenario, with the best interpreters. Many of the interpreters are mediocre, a polite description. Some have very limited competency.³⁰

On average it takes about one year of study to become proficient in a language. Seven years into operations in Afghanistan, the US should have more personnel speaking the local languages.

²⁷ Ward, Mark. “An Afghan Aid Disconnect.” Washington Post. December 26, 2008.

²⁸ Comment to Mark Ward’s article “An Afghan Aid Disconnect.” Made by “JohnB in Chevy Chase, MD.” December 26, 2008.

²⁹ “Six of 1,000 speak Arabic fluently at U.S. embassy in Iraq.” World Tribune.com, 7 December 2006.

³⁰ US Institute For Peace. Oral History Project: Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Interviewee #38, p 19.

Unity of Effort

The unity of effort in Afghanistan is based on personalities, and cooperative committees, not a command structure. The politics of working with other sovereign nations in NATO and the Afghan government creates its own bureaucratic infighting and political maneuvering. These issues fall outside the direct control of the President of the United States, but creating a unity of effort for US personnel is under his control. A unity of effort can be accomplished by following three recommendations. First, there needs to be one single person responsible for and held accountable for the US COIN efforts, civilian and military. Second, civilians and military personnel should be placed under one direct chain of command that requires subordinating civilians to military and vice versa. The most important part of this relationship is that the commanding personnel be given the responsibility to evaluate the performance of subordinates. Finally, maneuver elements and PRTs need to operate as one unit, not just in parallel. By unifying these command structures, and relationships the US can unify the efforts of all US personnel.

Currently, the PRTs are structured so the three lead agencies, State, USAID, and Defense, are co-equals in the command structure.³¹ The subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations recently concluded that the PRTs will “benefit from a more coherent structure that relies less on getting the right personalities together.”³² The report went further to say that both State and

³¹ Reference Appendix B

³² US House of Representatives: Committee on Armed Services: Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, April 2008. p 20. Also see the chart on page 21 to grasp the overall disjointedness of the command structure.

DOD “should unify leadership and command of Provincial Reconstruction Teams to match the accountability with authority and to ensure unity of effort.”³³

This is not the first time the US government has failed to unify efforts under one chain of command. This exact same problem plagued President Johnson in 1967, and it took his personal involvement to rectify the situation. The Civil Operations and Rural Development Support program or CORDS was the solution. It brought civilian and military efforts under one chain of command, and even went so far as to have civilians writing efficiency reports on soldiers and vice versa.³⁴ CORDS placed a USAID civilian into the third highest position in the military command structure in Vietnam, gave them the rank of Ambassador (equivalent to a three-star general) and placed him in charge of counterinsurgency operations.³⁵

The Subcommittee on Oversight and Intelligence wrote in their findings that current interagency unity of command had inhibited unity of effort, “which can result in uncoordinated, and even counterproductive, outcomes.”³⁶ This is not a surprise since uncoordinated actions in a COIN environment often are counterproductive.³⁷ Richard Stewart, in his assessment of CORDS, found that the program succeeded as best as it could in harnessing the full potential of a whole of government approach. It brought both civilian and military capabilities to bear on plans, finances, and resources.³⁸

³³ US House of Representatives: Committee on Armed Services: Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, April 2008, 35.

³⁴ Stewart, Richard W. “CORDS and the Vietnam Experience: An Interagency Organization for Counterinsurgency and Pacification.” Fort McNair, DC. May 1, 2006. Pg 117.

³⁵ Interview with Michael Casey, on March 30, 2009. Author of “The Country Team: Restructuring America’s First Line of Engagement.” Joint Forces Quarterly, issue 47, 4th quarter, 2007.

³⁶ Subcommittee on Oversight and Intelligence. Pg 35

³⁷ US Army Field Manual 3-24, Paragraph 2-7.

³⁸ Stewart, pg 115. Language was adapted to meet modern day terminology.

Another aspect of CORDS, was its total integration from the top levels of leadership down to the district level.³⁹ This level of unity does not exist in Afghanistan. The PRTs come the closest to putting civilian agencies close to the action, but as the PRT member described above, they are still far from the action at the district level.

To bring a unity of effort down to the district the military will need to adjust its approach to the maneuver commander and PRT commander relationship. Separating combat operations from reconstruction efforts is not a good approach. Looking at Ghazni province in 2007 there were around 80 PRT members (50 of which were support personnel) and approximately 700 maneuver battalion soldiers (excluding special forces). The province is the size of Maryland with rugged terrain in the middle. It takes roughly 3-4 days to drive east to west due to a lack of roads, and 1 day to drive north to south, on the one major road. The PRT commander in 2007 estimated that it would take 2 Brigades to control the area, which would roughly be six times as many soldiers as were present.⁴⁰

Linking the maneuver element with the PRT elements will minimize counterproductive activities and maximize the efficient use of limited resources. The US operates in some of the most remote and rugged areas of Afghanistan, with to few personnel. Placing multiple elements into these areas with various missions, and different command structures detracts from the efficient use of resources. This lesson was already learned in Vietnam, and it is readily apparent in Afghanistan.

It would be naïve to believe that subordinating one agency's personnel to another's would be done without serious bureaucratic infighting. Problems arose in 1967 when

³⁹ Stewart, pg 117.

⁴⁰ Captain Collidge, PRT Commander Ghazni Province, Presentation at Johns Hopkins SAIS. April 2, 2009. (Unconfirmed at time of submission)

discussions of subordinating agency personnel to other agencies were initially discussed. The only solution was to have direct presidential involvement, as well as, a strong leader on the ground with a like-minded military commander.⁴¹

Some argue that coordination between military and civilian elements will increase, as General Eikenberry becomes the new Ambassador to Afghanistan. However, this may not be the case. The history of CORDS shows that there may still be difficulties in coordination unless the actual chain of command, from top to bottom, is fully integrated. In 1964 General Maxwell Taylor, the former Joint Chiefs of Staff became the ambassador to Vietnam, but the problems of coordination still continued because they relied on cooperation and not delegation.⁴² The personality-based approach requires cooperation, and if this fails then infighting is the outcome. By placing one person in charge and subordinating the rest, the leader is able to delegate down to lower levels. This ability to delegate removes the risk that cooperation will fail, and places responsibility squarely on one person.

The biggest lesson from CORDS is that in order to unify effort the US must first unify the command structure. Cooperative command structures, like those currently found in the PRTs, may look good on paper, but can impede implementation.⁴³ Creating a plan is only half of the issue, implementation is the other. Flow charts and diagrams do not reveal the personalities needed to make things work on the ground. When time, resources, and lives are at stake one single person needs to be in charge who can delegate down to experts; not waste time attempting to foster an environment of agreement. This does not mean that the commander turns a deaf ear to subordinates, but it does mean they get the final say without fear that someone will call back

⁴¹ Stewart, pg 119.

⁴² Stewart, pg 12.

⁴³ Captain Coolidge, PRT Commander Ghazni Province, Presentation at Johns Hopkins SAIS. April 2, 2009. (Unconfirmed)

to headquarters in DC and usurp the effort. CORDS demonstrated a single COIN commander with an integrated staff evaluation system is the most efficient and effective means of creating a unity of effort.

Long-term Commitment

A unified command structure is essential, and so is a long-term commitment. The War in Afghanistan has already proven that it will not be short, and in order to win the US must plan for a long-term commitment. A development plan that reaches out decades is appropriate and realistic, at least to 2030. In order to sustain this level of commitment policy makers need to begin an American media campaign to ensure that there is sufficient public support for this effort. A general phasing out of US military presence and efforts can ideally occur under the current plan within 3-5 years, but long -term trainers, development, and financial support must remain for decades. US efforts in Bosnia demonstrate the need for long-term commitment. When President Clinton deployed US troops to Bosnia in 1995 he promised they would be out in one year. Almost 15 years later US troops are still supporting operations in Bosnia. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is beginning to plan how they will downsize. OSCE employees predict their presence to extend *at least* another 10 years, but probably more.⁴⁴

Luckily USAID development experts already understand this situation. Patrick Fine, the former director of the USAID mission in Afghanistan believes the US will maintain a presence in Afghanistan for at least the next 20 years.⁴⁵ This does not mean that the US military will still

⁴⁴ Liethar, Luc. Phone interview with Author. Advisor in the Department of Education at the OSCE. Sarajevo, Bosnia. 27 April 2009

⁴⁵ Fine, Patrick. Discussion held at the German Marshall Fund. 17 February 2009.

be fighting a war in Afghanistan, but it does highlight the realistic evaluation that the US will still be involved in Afghanistan in 20 years.

President Obama has put forth a plan that reasserts the US commitment to the War in Afghanistan. He just ordered 21,000 more soldiers to deploy to Afghanistan to conduct a variety of missions from training to fighting. The concept is to train up enough Afghan soldiers and police, so the US military presence can begin to draw down in approximately 3-5 years.

Although the details are debatable it does reflect a realistic strategy that the US needs to hand the fighting over to the Afghans who understand the environment, speak the language, who have a long-term commitment to their country, and have a more integrated civilian-military effort than a NATO alliance could ever wish for. As one PRT commander described Afghan soldiers as ten times more effective at conducting operations in his province than US soldiers.⁴⁶

But, the US commitment cannot stop with the handover of military efforts. Colombia's fight against its insurgency and drug war provides a model for the long-term commitment of US personnel. US Special Forces continue to operate in Colombia as advisers and trainers, but do not conduct missions for the Colombian military. The US has continued to provide billions of dollars a year in military, police, social, and economic assistance to Colombia.⁴⁷ Even if al-Qaeda and the Taliban are destroyed and discredited, never to return, Afghanistan still faces other monumental challenges that may topple the government in Kabul.

One of the most startling issues is Afghanistan's illicit opium economy is estimated at 1/3 of Afghan GDP, and it is the primary source of funding for the Taliban insurgents and possibly

⁴⁶ Captain Coolidge, PRT Commander Ghazni Province, Presentation at Johns Hopkins SAIS. April 2, 2009. (Unconfirmed)

⁴⁷ The Center for International Policy's: Colombia Program. Available at <http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/aidtable.htm>.

al-Qaeda.⁴⁸ Again, Colombia's drug trade is a good parallel to examine. For over 30 years, the government has battled insurgents financed by an illicit drug trade, and it looked like the government was going to fall in the late 1990s. The US stepped in with trainers and financial aid, which has helped the government regain momentum.

Next, Afghanistan ranks 174 out of 178 countries on the Human Development Index, which measures education, longevity, and economic performance.⁴⁹ With a life expectancy of 43 years and a literacy rate of 43% for males and 13% for females, it will be very difficult for the US to find literate and educated Afghan's to fill government positions.⁵⁰ This shortage of human capital will take at least a generation to fill, if not one Afghan life span of 43 years. Without addressing the development needs we may just be setting up a military machine without a competent government to control it.

The World Bank recently published a report that called for all donors and institutions supporting Afghanistan to recognize that state capacity building takes a long time commitment and in this case it will be more than a decade.⁵¹ The report points out how the regional and district level differences reflect the unorganized donor approaches to governance, and historical "accidents" that have influenced regions differently.⁵² It will take years if it is possible to create a functioning government that is accountable to its people, and more importantly that can control the massive military the international community is training.

⁴⁸ Olson, Rick. Discussion held at Johns Hopkins SAIS, Washington DC. 23 April 2009.

⁴⁹ "Afghanistan Human Development Report, 2007." United Nations Development Program: Center for Policy and Human Development. Kabul Afghanistan. 2007.

⁵⁰ CIA World Fact Book, Afghanistan. Available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

⁵¹ World Bank. "Building an Effective State. Priorities for Public Administration Reform." p. vii.

⁵² Ibid, p. x.

The US must be committed for decades in order to sustain the legitimate government in Afghanistan. Hopefully the war fighting can be passed off to local Afghan's in 3-5 years, but no one believes that creating a functioning government will be less than a decades long struggle.

Empower the Lowest Levels

This section examines the need for district level reconstruction efforts, and greater mobility for civilians. First, district level reconstruction teams allow for greater oversight of the actual situation on the ground, and deeper relationships to form between US personnel and the Afghan people. Greater oversight will help eliminate the disaster stories where construction projects crumble two years after completion due to substandard craftsmanship or deception. Also, it will allow for more mentoring of local government officials to ensure they have enough resources to provide for their people.

The US has not yet deployed enough civilian or military capacity to reach the lowest levels of the Afghan community in a meaningful way. Looking at the previously mentioned example in Ghazni province in 2007 demonstrates this shortfall. The military was short approximately 5 battalions, the PRT commander did not have any civilian advisers for the first four months of his deployment, and the PRT had difficulty reaching all areas of the province to monitor projects.⁵³

To the Afghans this lack of presence is perceived as a lack of concern for their local issues. Smaller towns and villages are used to a random "drive through" by US military personnel, but the Taliban live in the towns or conduct regular and frequent visits to all the towns. Their presence is reliable and feared. When the Taliban forces see the US forces coming, they simply put their weapons down and blend in with local tribesmen, who the US soldiers

⁵³ Captain Coolidge, PRT Commander Ghazni Province, Presentation at Johns Hopkins SAIS. April 2, 2009. (Unconfirmed)

cannot differentiate. If the US hopes to obtain intelligence and build rapport with locals, they need a continual presence that shows commitment and capabilities that can outlast the Taliban. In many areas the tribesmen are sick of the Taliban and warlords, but the US has not proven to be a reliable and dependable force in the country.⁵⁴

There is a need for district level reconstruction teams, a sufficient number of civilian experts, a synchronization of efforts, and greater mobility for the civilian experts. Increasing the number of civilian personnel was discussed in “Understanding the Environment” and synchronization of efforts was discussed in “Unity of Effort.”

Looking at FM 3-24, the minimum recommended counterinsurgent to resident ratio is 1:50, but also indicates that this number varies greatly depending on the local circumstances and may go as high as 1:40.⁵⁵ Since precise troop deployment numbers are classified it is difficult to say what the current ratio is, but it is fair to say that the number has not been adequate despite the upcoming deployment of 21,000 additional US personnel. According to Captain Coolidge, this ratio is currently around 1:430.⁵⁶ Increasing the number of personnel, and placing them within the local communities via district level teams will support the COIN efforts.

The final recommendation is to provide more transportation capabilities to civilian personnel. Recent observations in Kabul have shown that civilian project managers can only get out to their projects once or twice per week, which is inadequate for project management.⁵⁷ Part of this issue can be alleviated with unity of command between PRTs and maneuver elements.

⁵⁴ Zazai, Ajmal Khan. Interview with the author. 29 April 2009. He is a tribal leader in Paktika province.

⁵⁵ US Army Field Manual 3-24, Paragraph 1-67. Counterinsurgents include local police and military as well as US personnel.

⁵⁶ Captain Coolidge, PRT Commander Ghazni Province, Presentation at Johns Hopkins SAIS. April 2, 2009. (Unconfirmed)

⁵⁷ Source not disclosed. Interview with the author.

But, unless civilian experts are provided with their own maneuver assets they may still find project supervision placed in a lower priority.

ADDITIONAL FACTORS

So far this paper has focused on issues that the US can address without international coordination. The greater strategic view of the conflict reveals a level of complexity that goes outside the scope of this paper, but the reader should be aware of them when evaluating the situation on the ground. In the previous sections the issues of the opium trade and the low levels of education were mentioned in passing, but they deserve additional focus. Both the issue of the drug war and development are long-term concerns that have plagued other nations for decades. When deciding on where to place resources and how to use them, the following factors must be considered.

NATO

Afghanistan represents the first NATO engagement outside its immediate borders. Critics view this war as a test of NATO's future capabilities to be relevant as an alliance. So far many issues have surfaced that reveal the policy divides between nations. Individual national caveats have precluded the NATO commander from utilizing forces as he sees fit. European allies did not provide additional combat soldiers to bolster the number of soldiers that the US provided. The US needs to use a balance of politics and resources to gain support for its policies in Afghanistan, or it may find itself fighting the war alone. As one contractor put it, "I do not mean to discredit international cooperation, but the efforts necessary for ISAF to operate seem to hinder operations as a whole."⁵⁸

PAKISTAN

⁵⁸ Comment from a Free Range International Blog. Posted by "Chim Chim." Available at: <http://blog.freerangeinternational.com/?p=1242>

Taliban and al-Qaeda forces have established safe havens in Pakistan, and now threaten the government in Islamabad. As mentioned earlier, Taliban forces were able to come within 100km of Islamabad before Pakistan forces pushed them back. The Taliban have created a safe haven in the Swat Valley, and continue to pose a threat to the Pakistani government and cross freely into Afghanistan to launch attacks.

The threat of the Taliban in Pakistan changes the strategic value of Afghanistan for the United States. Pakistan has over 170 million people versus 33 million in Afghanistan. More threatening are the nuclear weapons and fuel that may fall into the hands of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Finally, regional dynamics may be altered between India and Pakistan if Pakistan is weakened. All of this is mentioned here to show the reader that the war in Afghanistan is not a one state problem it has massive regional repercussions to consider.

ECONOMIC CRISIS

The final additional factor to consider is the economic crisis. Does the US and NATO have the economic capacity to sustain this fight? As the economic situation worsens at home, how much money will America be able to put into the war in Afghanistan. “The Congressional Budget office now estimates the costs of the Iraq war, projected out through 2017, might top \$1 trillion, plus an extra \$705 billion in interest payments, and says the total cost of Iraq and Afghanistan combined could reach \$2.4 trillion.”⁵⁹ This paper calls for more resources and efforts to be put into Afghanistan, but this may not be fiscally responsible during this economic downturn.

CONCLUSION

⁵⁹ Teslik, Lee Hudson. “Iraq, Afghanistan, and the U.S. Economy.” March 11, 2008.
<http://www.cfr.org/publication/15404/>

The outcome of the war in Afghanistan will be influenced by a wide variety of factors. Most of these factors require a complex political solution that involves regional and non-regional actors to get involved. This paper focused on the policies that the US could change within its own COIN strategy. Adjusting these policies will not guarantee victory, but they will bring additional skills and efficacy to the US fight against enemy forces in Afghanistan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations in this paper followed from four principles from the US Army's Counterinsurgency Manual (FM3-24). Those principles are: understand the environment, create a whole of government approach, plan for long-term involvement, and operate at the lowest levels of governance. Below is the list of concrete examples that the US government should implement.

- A. Return US personnel on their second deployments to the same province or district where they were before. This will assist in continuity of information between units, and increase understanding of local condition.
- B. Deploy sufficient staff to cover all responsibilities with properly trained personnel, not military stand-ins.
- C. Improve rotational handovers by keeping senior personnel in place longer, and creating a classified database of hand-off material. The database will allow incoming units to tailor their training towards specific provincial concerns.
- D. State and USAID personnel need to accept more risk and operate in the semi-permissive and non-permissive environments. Civilian personnel need to leave the confines of Kabul if they are to positively impact the mission.
- E. Learn the language. Too much is lost in translation to have decision makers relying on translators when making discussing or debating critical decisions.
- F. Create a position for one person who manages the entire COIN effort. Unifying the chain of command will go a long way in creating a unity of effort. This chain of command should

place civilians in charge of military personnel and vice versa all the way from the top to the bottom.

- G. Maneuver units and PRTs should operate as one. The current personality based cooperation is unreliable, and resources can be utilized more efficiently to help maintain a civilian presence in the field.
- I. Plan a strategic vision out to 2030 so all actors are following the same strategic timeline. This can help provide a common vision for the different US elements operating in Afghanistan.
- J. Get public buy-in now so US citizens are not surprised when the US maintains a presence in Afghanistan for decades, which is what will be required.
- K. Develop Afghan capabilities under realistic timelines. The war has already gone on for eight years, and the enemy has not been defeated. The US must be realistic in setting timelines when they ask the Afghan's to do what the world's strongest military cannot.
- L. Deploy more civilian experts with the necessary skill sets determined by the local needs of the Afghan people. This can only be determined by placing civilian experts amongst the Afghan population.
- M. Create District level reconstruction teams to ensure that US forces have a significant and constant presence at the lowest levels of governance.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

“Agency Stovepipes vs. Strategic Agility: Lessons We Need to Learn from Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq and Afghanistan.” US House of Representative, Committee on Armed Services: Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigation. April 2008.

The Honorable Robert M. Gates, Landon Lecture at Kansas State University, November 26, 2007

Eikenberry, Karl. Former US Commander Afghanistan and Nominated Ambassador to Afghanistan. Presentation at George Washington University. February 25, 2009.

Free Range International Blog. Available at <http://blog.freerangeinternational.com/>

Obama, Barack. President of the United States. “Prepared Remarks of President Barack Obama: A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.” March 27, 2009. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/27/world/asia/27remarks.html>

Jalali, Ali Ahmad. “Afghanistan: Regaining Momentum.” Parameters. Winter 2007-2008.

Barno, David W., Former Commander Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan (CFC –A), Presentation at the United States Institute of Peace, 26 October 2005.

Jalali, Ali. Former Minister of the Interior, Afghanistan, Presentation at the United States Institute of Peace, 26 October 2005.

Perito, Robert., Coordinator, Afghanistan Experience Project, Presentation at the United States Institute of Peace, 26 October 2005.

Michailof, Serge., Former Executive Director of operations of the French Development Agency. Presentation at the German Marshall Fund, 17 February, 2009

Fine, Patrick C., Former USAID Mission Director in Afghanistan. Presentation at German Marshall Fund February 17, 2009.

Peter Feaver, “The Long War in Afghanistan” NPR: Talk of the Nation, March 25, 2009.

Ward, Mark. “An Afghan Aid Disconnect.” The Washington Post. December 26, 2008. Available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/25/AR2008122500663.html?hpid=opinionsbox1>

White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group’s Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan. March 27, 2009.

Oral Histories Project on Stability Operations: Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Teams. United States Institute for Peace. Available at http://www.usip.org/library/oh/afghanistan_prt.html
Interview #38, July 19, 2005.

Secondary Sources

Oakley, Robert B. and Michael Casey, Jr. "The Country Team: Restructuring America's First Line of Engagement." Joint Force Quarterly, Issue 47, 4th Quarter 2007.

Roi, M.L. and G. Smolyne. "End States, Resource Allocation and NATO Strategy in Afghanistan." Diplomacy and Statecraft, Volume 19, 2nd Quarter, 2008

State Department: Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) website on Afghanistan. Available at <http://www.crs.state.gov/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.display&shortcut=4979>

Stewart, Richard W. "CORDS and the Vietnam Experience: An Interagency Organization for Counterinsurgency and Pacification." National War College, Fort McNair, DC. 1 May 2006.

The US Army / Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual. US Army Field Manual No. 3-24 University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Chapters 9 & 10 in: Building State and Security in Afghanistan.

Robert M. Perito. "The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan." Special Report 152, USIP, October 2005. (URL:

<http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr152.html>)

Michael J. Dziedzic and Colonel Michael K. Seidl. "Provincial Reconstruction Team." Special Report 147, USIP, September 2005. (URL: <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr147.pdf>)

Michael Bhatia, Kevin Lanigan & Philip Wilkinson. "Minimal Investments, Minimal Results: The Failure of Security Policy in Afghanistan." AREU: Briefing Paper, June 2004. (URL: http://www.areu.org.af/download_pub.asp?id=150)

Paul O'Brian. "A New Year's Resolution to Keep: Securing a Lasting Peace in Afghanistan." CARE International in Afghanistan, Policy Brief, January 2003.

Paul O'Brian. "PRTs – Guaranteeing or Undermining a Secure Future in Afghanistan?"

Interviews or Presentations

Casey, Michael. Phone Interview. April 2, 2009.

Cohen, Elliot. Group Discussion. Washington DC. 6 May 2009.

Turner, Paul. Department of State: Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, deployed to Afghanistan. Email response to questions. Answers Received on April 2, 2009.

Zazai, Ajmal Khan. Interview with the Author. Washington DC. 29 April 2009

Appendix

Location of ISAF PRTs as of May 2008.

Source: GAO 09-86R Provincial Reconstruction Teams



Appendix B

US Command Structure for a PRT

Source: GAO 09-86R Provincial Reconstruction Teams, PG 7.



Eric Kessler
April 2, 2009

Appendix

Number of Military and civilian personnel assigned to PRTs 2007-2008

Source: GAO 09-86R Provincial Reconstruction Teams, Pg 9

	DOD	State	USAID	USDA	Total
2008					
US-led PRTs	1021	11	11	12	1055
Other PRTs	N/A	7	8	0	15
TOTAL	1021	18	19	12	1070
2007					
US-led PRTs	994	11	11	7	1023
Other PRTs	N/A	7	9	0	16
Total	994	18	20	7	1039

Population by Province (1990 Census)

Source: <http://www.statoids.com/uaf.html>

NOTE: CIA World Factbook puts the Total Afghan Population at 33,000,000 according to 2008 estimates

Afghanistan is divided into 34 velayat (provinces).

Province	Population	Area (km. ²)	Area (mi. ²)	Capital
Badakhshan	805,500	44,059	17,011	Feyzabad
Badghis	420,400	20,591	7,950	Qal'eh-ye Now
Baghlan	762,500	21,118	8,154	Pol-e Khomri
Balkh	1,073,000	17,249	6,660	Mazar-e Sharif
Bamian	379,200	14,175	5,473	Bamian
Daikondi	391,000	8,088	3,123	Khadir
Farah	428,800	48,471	18,715	Farah
Faryab	840,400	20,293	7,835	Meymaneh
Ghazni	1,040,100	22,915	8,847	Ghazni
Ghowr	585,900	36,479	14,085	Chaghcharan
Helmand	782,100	58,584	22,619	Lashgar Gah
Herat	1,544,800	54,778	21,150	Herat
Jowzjan	452,000	11,798	4,555	Sheberghan
Kabul	3,071,600	4,462	1,723	Kabul
Kandahar	990,100	54,022	20,858	Kandahar
Kapisa	374,500	1,842	711	Mahmud-e-Eraqi

Khowst	487,400	4,152	1,603	Khowst
Konar	381,900	4,942	1,908	Asadabad
Konduz	833,300	8,040	3,104	Konduz
Laghman	378,100	3,843	1,484	Mehtar Lam
Lowgar	332,400	3,880	1,498	Pol-e 'Alam
Nangarhar	1,261,900	7,727	2,984	Jalalabad
Nimruz	138,500	41,005	15,832	Zaranj
Nurestan	125,700	9,225	3,562	Kamdish
Oruzgan	297,200	22,696	8,763	Tarin Kowt
Paktia	467,500	6,432	2,483	Gardez
Paktika	369,100	19,482	7,522	Sharan
Panjshir	130,400	3,610	1,394	Bazarak
Parvan	560,800	5,974	2,307	Charikar
Samangan	327,700	11,262	4,348	Aybak
Sar-e Pol	472,700	15,999	6,177	Sar-e Pol
Takhar	827,500	12,333	4,762	Taloqan
Vardak	506,300	8,938	3,451	Maidanshahr
Zabol	257,600	17,343	6,696	Qalat
TOTAL	22,097,900	645,807	249,347	