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Embracing the Fog of War

ASSESSMENT AND METRICS IN COUNTERINSURGENCY

BEN CONNABLE

Prepared for the U.S. Department of Defense
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited



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The research described in this report was prepared for the U.S. Department of Defense. The research was conducted within the RAND National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by OSD, the Joint Staff, the Unified Combatant Commands, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the defense agencies, and the defense Intelligence Community under Contract W74V8H-06-C-0002.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Connable, Ben.

Embracing the fog of war : assessment and metrics in counterinsurgency /

Ben Connable.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8330-5815-7 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Counterinsurgency—United States—Evaluation. 2. Counterinsurgency—Afghanistan—Evaluation. 3. Counterinsurgency—Vietnam—Evaluation. I. Title.

U241C63 2012

355.02'180973—dc23

2012001598

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Cover design by Carol Earnest

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Published 2012 by the RAND Corporation

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Summary

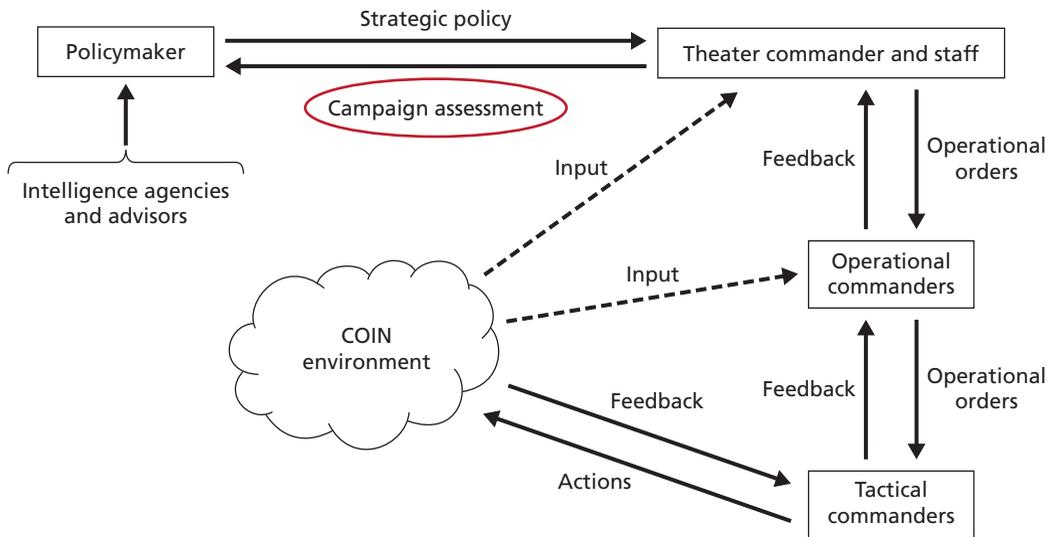
This monograph examines the U.S. military assessment process for counterinsurgency (COIN) campaigns. It focuses on the methods employed to develop and present to policymakers these theater-level assessments of ongoing campaigns. In support of this process, it captures the complexity of the COIN operational environment, examines case studies of COIN assessment in context, explores critical weaknesses in the current assessment process, and offers recommendations for improvement.

Sound strategic decisionmaking in military campaigns relies, in part, on the quality of campaign assessments. The quality of an assessment, in turn, reflects the methodology used to produce the assessment report or other materials: An assessment derived from a poorly conceived methodology might mislead decisionmakers, while a well-conceived assessment process might help shape a winning strategy. U.S. military campaign assessments are developed by a theater commander (for example, GEN William C. Westmoreland during the Vietnam War or Gen. John R. Allen during the current war in Afghanistan) for senior military and civilian decisionmakers. To produce a campaign assessment, military staffs currently collect and analyze information about a campaign's progress and then develop narratives, briefings, and other materials that can be provided to decisionmakers. The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and policymakers in Congress and the executive branch rely on these field reports to help them allocate (or reallocate) resources, identify trends that may indicate success or failure, and ascertain whether and when it may be necessary to alter a given strategy.

Figure S.1 provides an overview of the U.S. military's current approach to COIN campaign assessment. The assessment process begins with strategic direction from policymakers to the theater commander and staff.¹ The theater commander then interprets the request and produces operational orders for the units under his command.

¹ A more detailed schematic would show several layers of processing between the policymakers and the theater commander (e.g., the National Security Council, the combatant commander). This figure is purposefully simplified to convey the general concept and process of assessment throughout the U.S. military. This process, the different layers of command, the relationships among actors, and the characteristics of the COIN environment are discussed in greater detail later in this monograph.

Figure S.1
Overview of the COIN Campaign Assessment Process



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These orders are reinterpreted and executed at various organizational levels in theater, from the operational to the tactical. These actions in the COIN operating environment produce feedback. This feedback is then passed back up through the chain of command to the theater commander and staff, who use the information, along with other inputs, to produce a campaign assessment. The commander delivers this assessment to the policymakers, who combine it with other resources (e.g., intelligence agency reports, advisory briefs) and reshape policy, beginning the cycle again.²

The military is most capable of producing clear and useful campaign assessments when provided with clearly articulated and understandable strategic objectives. In the absence of such guidance, military staffs are left scrambling to design operational objectives, and then assessments, that seem reasonable—and assessments derived from an unclear strategy are unlikely to satisfy anyone. With a clear, well-defined strategic policy in place, the military can develop an assessment process to answer questions that relate specifically to policymaker requirements. In a best-case scenario, assessments should be tied directly to national policy objectives, and policymakers should be able to view such assessments with relative confidence.

The U.S. military has taken two broad approaches to assessing the progress of COIN campaigns. The first approach—*effects-based assessment* (EBA)—attempts to

² The figure also shows how information, or “inputs,” from other sources in the COIN environment (e.g., civilian agencies, host-nation organizations) can be incorporated into the assessment process. Feedback from policy action implemented in theater is only one type of information used for assessment; a great deal of information is derived from activities or observations that are not directly associated with friendly actions.

pinpoint and quantify events on the ground to produce centralized and highly accurate reports. The second approach—*pattern and trend analysis*—uses centralized quantitative analysis to produce a more-or-less impressionistic or, in some cases, deterministic understanding of campaign momentum. Both these approaches are centralized and rely to a great degree on quantitative measurement. No other comprehensive approach has been described or advocated in the literature on military COIN assessment.³ In practice, the military has relied on an ad hoc approach to COIN assessment that lies somewhere between EBA and pattern and trend analysis.

Neither of these two centralized assessment methods is practical for COIN because, according to U.S. military doctrine, COIN is best practiced as a decentralized type of warfare predicated on “mission command.” Indeed, doctrine envisions the COIN battlespace as a “mosaic” of localized situations, challenges, and possible solutions.⁴ Decentralization and mission command necessitate a loosely structured, localized approach to prosecuting war. Such an approach allows commanders at the tactical level to assess local conditions and implement initiatives tailored to address local challenges. Due to the decentralized nature of COIN campaigns, few activities are generalizable or consistently implemented across a COIN theater of operations. This situation is exacerbated by the complexity and uncertainty inherent in the environment. It would be difficult (if not impossible) to develop a practical, centralized model for COIN assessment because complex COIN environments cannot be clearly interpreted through a centralized process that removes data from their salient local context. The incongruity between decentralized and complex COIN operations and centralized, decontextualized assessment has led military staffs to rely on ad hoc assessment methods that leave policymakers and the public dissatisfied with U.S. COIN campaign assessments.

This monograph examines and critiques EBA and pattern and trend analysis in an effort to explain why policymakers and the public tend to be dissatisfied with U.S. military assessments of COIN campaigns. That phase of the study involved 16 months of research, a detailed examination of two case studies and a review of a third case study, interviews and discussions with hundreds of operations and assessment officials from the battalion to the DoD level, and exchanges with policymakers and their staffs. Among those who offered their perspectives, there were significant concerns about the effectiveness and methodology of the current assessment process as it is being applied in support of COIN campaign assessment in Afghanistan. To provide historical con-

³ The few alternatives to EBA that have been offered are centralized and quantitative and do not represent a significant departure from EBA. Most of the assessment literature relies on centralized, quantitative systems analysis methods to frame the COIN operating environment and to assess COIN campaigns. Although a review of COIN assessment methods did not uncover a viable alternative, this does not preclude the possibility that one exists but was simply not captured by the literature review.

⁴ According to Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations* (U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2009c, p. III-19), “The mosaic nature of COIN is ideally suited to decentralized execution.”

text for an examination of the current assessment process, the study also considered the case of COIN campaign assessment and outcomes during the Vietnam War era. The literature on the U.S. military's Vietnam-era assessment process was highly negative; even the most strident defenders of the assessment reports produced during that period expressed dissatisfaction with the process.

Although, as discussed earlier, the assessment literature contains no clearly articulated alternative to the two accepted forms of COIN assessment (EBA and pattern and trend analysis), advocates of a *traditionalist* approach to warfare have critiqued the theories behind EBA and have voiced doubt that any quantitative approach could produce assessment materials with greater utility at the policymaking level.⁵ Traditionalists, including General James N. Mattis, adhere to strict interpretations of capstone service doctrine that describe warfare as inherently complex and chaotic. Some advocates of EBA and most advocates of pattern and trend analysis also acknowledge the complex and chaotic nature of war, but they argue that centralized assessment can sufficiently overcome these challenges to inform policy. Traditionalists argue that complexity and chaos cannot be adequately overcome through centralized and quantitative analysis. Despite this debate, no viable alternative to centralized assessment has emerged from these traditionalist critiques or from other quarters.

The study also produced a framework of standards for COIN assessment. These standards were derived from a detailed literature review, interviews with experts and practitioners, exchanges with subject-matter experts, and direct observation of field assessment activities. The first two standards—transparency and credibility—are deemed requisite for successful COIN assessment in a democracy. All assessment reports should be relevant to policymakers; this is clear in the campaign assessment process as presented in Figure S.1. The other four standards are practical requirements that should be met to establish an effective methodology. The seven standards are as follows:

1. *Transparent*: Transparent assessment reports are widely releasable to official consumers and, ideally, are unclassified and without distribution restrictions; the final iteration of the report is suitable for distribution on the Internet. Such reports reveal both the methods and data used at each level of assessment, from tactical to strategic, and allow for detailed and in-depth analysis without requiring additional research or requests for information. Any subjectivity or justification for disagreements between layers of command is explained clearly and comprehensively.

⁵ “Traditionalist” is a non-doctrinal, unofficial term used to help frame the discussion presented here. It should not be confused with “traditional warfare” as described in JP 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations* (U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2009c, p. I-8). Here, traditional warfare is equated with conventional warfare. Traditionalists adhere to the theories of capstone doctrine and maneuver warfare, as discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

2. *Credible*: Credible assessment reports are also transparent, because opacity devalues any report to the level of opinion: If the data and methods used to produce the report cannot be openly examined and debated, consumers have no reason to trust the reporter. In credible reports, all biases are explained, and flaws in data collection, valuation, and analysis are clearly articulated. Data are explained in context. Such reports clearly explain the process used by commanders and staffs to select methods and are both accurate and precise to the greatest degree possible.
3. *Relevant*: Relevant reports effectively and efficiently inform policy consideration of COIN campaign progress. They are sufficient to help senior military leaders and policymakers determine resourcing and strategy, and they satisfy public demand for knowledge up to the point that they do not reveal sensitive or classified information.
4. *Balanced*: Balanced reports reflect information from all relevant sources available to military staffs and analysts, including both quantitative and qualitative data. Such reports reflect input from military commanders at all levels of command and are broad enough in scope to incorporate nonmilitary information and open-source data. Balanced reports include countervailing opinions and analysis, as well as data that both agree with and contradict the overall findings.
5. *Analyzed*: Ideally, finished reports do not simply reflect data input and the analysis of single data sets. They also contain thorough analyses of all available data used to produce a unified, holistic assessment. This analysis should be objective and predicated on at least a general methodological framework that can be modified to fit changing conditions and, if necessary, challenged by consumers. The requirement for holistic analysis is commonly voiced in the assessment literature.
6. *Congruent*: COIN assessment theory should be congruent with current U.S. joint and service understanding of warfare, the COIN environment, and the way in which COIN campaigns should be prosecuted. The standard for congruence was drawn from a combination of joint doctrine and service capstone doctrine, as discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.
7. *Parsimonious*: Assessment cannot show all aspects of a COIN campaign, nor should it seek or claim to deliver omniscience. Collection and reporting requirements for assessment should be carefully considered relative to the demands and risk they may leverage on subordinate units. Assessment should rely to the greatest extent possible on information that is generated through intelligence and operational activities, without requiring additional collection and reporting.

This framework shaped the study's examination and critique of the current U.S. military COIN assessment process. It also provides a starting point for identifying potential alternatives or improvements to the current process. While the examination

of EBA and pattern and trend analysis is critical, the ultimate purpose of this monograph is to help improve operational and strategic doctrine and practice for COIN assessment. The recommendations presented here are designed to support military commanders in their efforts to produce credible COIN assessments for policymakers and the public.

The most important recommendation to improve COIN assessment is to ensure that the overall process includes contextual assessment. The concept of contextual assessment as discussed here is framed by the seven criteria identified as useful standards for assessment. This monograph develops and uses this concept as a springboard for further exploration of alternative options to the current approach to COIN assessment. It is not intended to be the only option available to enhance the assessment process, nor is it necessarily the best option available. It is, however, intended to broaden the conceptual understanding of assessment methodology and pave the way for improvement.

Findings

The findings presented here call into question the use of centralized quantitative approaches to COIN assessment. An examination of theater-level assessments conducted in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan shows that U.S. COIN assessment has long relied on centralized and decontextualized quantitative methods at the expense of context, relevant qualitative data, and comprehensive analytic methods. This conclusion does not suggest, however, that quantitative data are not useful or that they are less valuable for COIN assessment than qualitative data. *Rather, quantitative and qualitative data should be assessed equally, in context, and according to appropriate criteria.* Further, because the findings presented here are narrowly focused on campaign COIN assessment, they have no proven bearing on the relative merit of quantitative methodologies used to assess other aspects of COIN operations (e.g., logistics), conventional warfare, or in any other military endeavor.

Key Finding

Context is critical: It is not possible to assess COIN campaign progress through centralized measurement because this approach cannot reflect the contextual nuance of a COIN campaign. Assessment tells policymakers what has happened so they can try to gauge progress or failure. Analysis, as a function of either assessment or intelligence, tells policymakers why events occurred and how they might unfold in the future. Efforts to measure (rather than assess or analyze) COIN campaigns using aggregated and centralized quantitative methods provide neither of these services effectively. Centralized quantitative reports (e.g., graphs, color-coded maps, aggregated tables) tend to contain data that are inaccurate to a significant degree; they also lack context and fail

to account for qualitative inputs. Consequently, such reports often produce inaccurate or misleading findings. When they do identify recognizable patterns, these patterns may be misleading or insufficient to support policy decisions. Trends that are tied to mathematical thresholds can convey unrealistic accuracy and quantitative thresholds and milestones that are highly subjective. Patterns and trends can support assessment, but they cannot stand alone. Effective assessment depends on capturing and then relating contextual understanding in a way that is digestible to senior decisionmakers.

The Realities of Policy

At least for the duration of the Afghanistan campaign, policymakers will continue to require independent sets of aggregated quantitative metrics to support decisionmaking. Assessment staffs should make every effort to compensate for the inherent inadequacies and flaws in these metrics to support policymaker requirements. This monograph describes best practices in assessment as identified through empirical research, but it is important to note that best practices are not always attainable in the face of wartime friction and attendant bureaucratic realities. When required to measure the progress of a COIN campaign, civilian officials and military officers should strive to place metrics in context and to carefully tie visual representations of data to explanatory narratives. They should balance quantitative metrics with probability and accuracy ratings and also identify and explain gaps in the available information. All information should be clearly sourced and should be retrievable by policy staffs seeking an in-depth understanding of specific subjects. If possible, all quantitative reports should be presented as part of holistic, all-source analysis. Transparency and analytic quality might enhance the credibility of aggregated quantitative data.

General Findings on Assessment in Counterinsurgency

This research led to a number of findings and conclusions associated with the role of assessment in informing the future direction of COIN campaigns, as well as the benefits to those responsible for decisionmaking in support of such campaigns.

An effective theater-level assessment is transparent, credible, and relevant to policymakers. Western democracies depend on sustainable public support to prosecute what are often lengthy COIN campaigns. Building and sustaining trust in official government assessments requires a process that is both transparent and credible. Transparent reports are (preferably) unclassified and share with consumers the underlying data and the methods used at each level of assessment. Credibility is derived from transparency, accuracy, and the use of a sound methodology that captures the relevant context. Relevant reports are those that successfully and efficiently inform policy and satisfy the public need for information.

Centralized assessments built from aggregated data do not produce transparent or credible reports. Centralized, uniform, top-down assessment requirements, aggregation, and decontextualization can undermine transparency by obscuring data

sources or the reasoning behind subordinate assessments. An assessment methodology that does not adhere to the tenet of transparency can undermine the credibility of a COIN campaign among consumers of the assessment report and the public.

There is general agreement that information and data sets in COIN assessment materials are inaccurate and incomplete to a significant yet unknown degree. U.S. military doctrine, the COIN literature, at least two U.S. Secretaries of Defense, and senior assessment analysts reviewing case studies from Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan concur that much of the information that is collected and fed into the COIN assessment process is both inaccurate and incomplete to a significant yet unknown degree.

COIN information is best analyzed at the level at which it is collected. The COIN environment is complex and marked by sometimes-extreme variations in physical and human terrain, varying degrees of progress from area to area (and often from village to village), and varying levels of counterinsurgent presence and collection capability. Therefore, information can have very different meanings from place to place and over time.

Holistic military campaign assessment is not scientific research. Sometimes, campaign assessment is likened to scientific research. As this examination shows, assessment is not scientific research, and most assessment data and methods cannot be held to strict scientific standards. Because assessment is not scientific research, campaign assessment reports should not be held to scientific standards, nor should attendant data be presented as objective research findings. This conclusion relates to the study's key finding that COIN assessment must be considered within the appropriate context. What holds true for one COIN campaign may not for another campaign being conducted elsewhere.

It may be possible to identify some generalized patterns of behavior or trends in activity from aggregated quantitative metrics, but patterns and trends do not constitute assessments. Data can sometimes indicate very broad patterns of behavior or trends over time, but few patterns or trends can show clear cause and effect. Those that show correlation can be useful in some cases but usually only to help clarify more detailed assessments. Furthermore, inaccurate data can produce precise but inaccurate patterns and trends, which, in turn, can mislead both assessment staffs and policymakers. Many aggregated pattern and trend graphs can be interpreted as having diametrically opposed meanings by different consumers because these graphs do not reflect causal evidence.

Centralized, top-down assessment collection requirements are unparsimonious, they can unhelpfully shape behavior at the tactical level, and they undermine broadly accepted tenets of irregular warfare. The use of a centralized list of metrics (i.e., a "core metrics list") for assessment sets what is essentially a standard for performance at the tactical level of operation—a standard that is often used to gauge the success or failure of military commanders. This informal standard of performance may encourage a misdirection of COIN efforts and an inappropriate expenditure of

resources because not all areas across a COIN theater of operations require the same application of techniques or resources at any one point in time or over time. For example, a core metric may require subordinate units to report the number of schools in each area of operation, but while schools may be critical to success in one area, they may be far less meaningful in another. Regardless of conditions, both units might feel compelled to focus on building or supporting schools due to the influence of the core metric.

Trying to find the “right” metrics is an exercise in futility. There are no inherently “good” or “bad” metrics in COIN. No single metric is necessarily good or bad. For example, it would not be correct to say, “A reduction in violence is always good,” because such an outcome could be the result of coalition withdrawal leading to defeat, a change in insurgent tactics, or insurgent victory. In specific cases, the oft-maligned body count metric might be useful, but only if these data are supported by evidence of progress toward a specific objective (e.g., a unit identifies 50 foreign fighters and the objective is to eliminate that unit of foreign fighters). It may be helpful to describe the potential strengths and weaknesses of various metrics in various contexts, but these descriptions should not be taken as prescription.

Standing U.S. military doctrine on COIN assessment is, with few exceptions, incongruent with the literature and doctrine on COIN operations and environments. Joint and some service doctrine calls for the application of traditional COIN fundamentals in the form of bottom-up, distributed operations while simultaneously recommending a top-down, centralized assessment of those operations. Effects-based language that should have been removed by 2008 persists in joint doctrine and in practice in 2011. Effects-based theory has challenged the ability of the assessment process to usefully serve consumers at the tactical and policy levels.

COIN assessment is a poorly understood process. Few military officers, commanders, or policymakers have a strong understanding of the inner workings of COIN assessment. Neither military training nor military education adequately addresses COIN assessment, and there is little or no interagency collaboration on assessment in the U.S. government. Furthermore, assessment is rarely integral to U.S. or NATO COIN campaign planning and execution.

Counterinsurgency Assessment in Afghanistan

Commanders and staffs must make due with the assessment tools they have on hand in the absence of a clearly defined, substantiated process. Because literature and experience with modern COIN assessment are limited and doctrine provides inadequate and sometimes contradictory guidance on assessment, commanders and staffs must make due with sometimes inventive but generally ad hoc solutions.

The drive to create large data repositories for core metrics to meet requirements in Afghanistan has proved to be ineffective and, in some ways, counterproductive. Inequities generated by “one-size-fits-all” collection requirements and weak

communication infrastructure have prevented the development of a comprehensive, centralized report database. The centralized databases that exist are incomplete and contain an unknown number of inaccuracies. Even if these databases were sound, they would permit and encourage analysis of raw and aggregated data devoid of context. Assessment analysts who work with these databases spend an inordinate amount of time rectifying and categorizing data instead of analyzing data that have already been contextualized by subordinate units.

As of early 2011, assessment was not synonymous with analysis. At least until early 2011, campaign assessment reports tended to contain very little comprehensive analysis and often included summaries of subordinate analyses that did not follow a common methodology. Theater assessments were often little more than summations of data reporting combined with uncoordinated and inconsistent subordinate insights. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan has recently attempted to incorporate analysis into assessment, but these efforts are limited and do not reflect a comprehensive shift in approach to COIN campaign assessment.

Assessments of the Afghanistan COIN campaign suffer from a lack of transparency and credibility. The various assessments of the Afghanistan campaign reflect a mix of EBA-like measurement and pattern and trend analysis. Reports tend to emphasize measurement. This emphasis, in turn, reflects U.S. effects-based doctrine that is heavily reliant on perception of effects, core metrics lists, and the presentation of aggregated or otherwise decontextualized data.

Reports tend not to explain inconsistencies inherent in COIN assessment. Methods of data collection, data analysis, and assessment reporting vary from level to level, laterally from unit to unit, and over time. While the realities of COIN may require variation in assessment, there has been little effort to capture or explain these variations for consumers.

Centralized military assessment in coalition and whole-of-government COIN warfare (e.g., ISAF in Afghanistan) does not and cannot reflect consistent or controlled information or data collection. Producing even a nonscientific centralized assessment based on pattern and trend analysis requires some degree of control over the collection of information and the inputs to the assessment process. But contemporary COIN demands a whole-of-government and, often, a coalition approach. With some exceptions, an external military force (e.g., the United States in Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan) cannot explicitly task nonmilitary agencies—and can only indirectly task allies—to collect and report information or data. Similarly, host nation agencies may not respond to U.S. military assessment requirements or may respond to data requests selectively. Sets of data managed by U.S. or coalition forces often do not reflect input from all areas of the battlefield under coalition control or from all echelons of command.

Recommendations

The study's findings point to five primary recommendations for those involved with COIN campaign analysis at both the tactical and policy levels.

Conduct a thorough review of U.S. military assessment doctrine. Both U.S. joint and service staffs should conduct reviews with the purpose of rectifying contradictions and inconsistencies in doctrine.

Train and educate military staff officers to understand and incorporate assessment into COIN campaigns. The services should consider incorporating campaign assessment theory and practice into training and education programs that address COIN planning and operations.

Conduct a review of interagency COIN assessment. An interagency panel should address the lack of coordination between DoD and nonmilitary government agencies that are likely to participate in COIN campaigns (e.g., the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Agency for International Development).

Incorporate all-source methodology as used by the intelligence community into the campaign assessment process. Analysis is generally absent from campaign assessment at least in part because there is no clearly defined assessment analysis process. All-source intelligence methodology provides a good framework for assessment and could be used to both improve and structure campaign assessment reports.

Implement a decentralized, objective-focused assessment process that incorporates sound analysis, or at least narrative context, at all levels. Any alternative to the current process must operate within the realities of the COIN environment and should aspire to transparency, credibility, and the other standards presented earlier. The data that it incorporates should be analyzed at the level at which they are collected, and this analysis should be balanced by in-depth analyses at higher levels. Assessments written to address campaign or theater-level objectives should be founded on layers of contextual analysis. Layered context will provide what might be described as “analysis in depth.” In addition, all data sources should be clearly cited. The U.S. military should adopt or at least attempt to implement some variation of contextual COIN assessment.

A Note About Contextual Assessment

Contextual assessment is a framework for COIN assessment that better aligns it with capstone military doctrine and COIN operational doctrine. This comprehensive, bottom-up assessment process builds layers of contextual narrative and data from the battalion to the theater level. The assessment process should be decentralized, but the reporting process should be standardized across the theater to ensure consistency and continu-

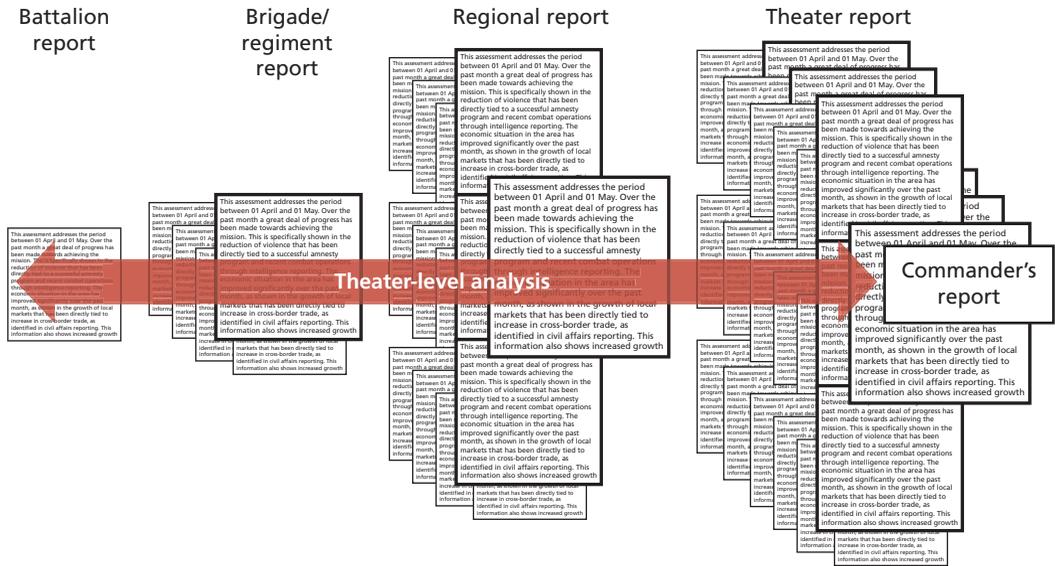
ity over time.⁶ Every report—from the battalion to the theater level—would be wholly captured by the final theater report. *In the best-case scenario, analysis would be conducted at each level.* The creation of a long-form assessment would ensure that policymakers, the public, and senior leadership have access to detailed justification for the findings in executive summary reports. More importantly, a comprehensive long-form assessment would provide a sound basis for theater- and policy-level assessments. *Thus, consumers will not have to read several hundred pages of assessment, analysis, and data,* but the information will be available to provide depth, transparency, and credibility as needed.

Commanders' inputs are a critical element of holistic operational COIN assessment. A commander's *coup d'oeil*, or eye for the battlefield, is indispensable not only for sound decisionmaking in combat but also in helping to assess what has happened and what might happen in a complex combat environment. Military commanders are handpicked for command, and policymakers and the public necessarily rely on them to a significant degree in times of war. However, commanders' assessments are often incorrectly deemed wholly subjective and thus suspect. In the absence of layered contextual analysis, it is difficult for commanders to argue that their personal analysis is more substantive than subjective opinion. Contextual assessment is designed to reinforce commanders' assessments by giving weight to their analyses. All commanders, from the battalion to the theater level, would benefit considerably from a transparent, credible, and contextual approach to assessment.

Figure S.2 shows how battalion reports are folded into regiment- or brigade-level reports and then into regional reports in the proposed contextual analysis framework. The theater report contains each of these component reports and may be several hundred pages in length, but it does contain built-in summaries at each level. By comparison, the unclassified semiannual DoD assessment report on Afghanistan and Iraq is between 60 and 150 pages and includes only a single summary and almost no operational context or detailed citations. The theater-level report includes narrative justifications and superior analysis of subordinate reports at each level. These analyses, or critiques, help address the inherent bias of narrative assessment. To further counter bias in the narrative reports, the theater-level analytic team provides a comprehensive analysis of the entire theater report. Finally, the commander provides an overall assessment. The theater-level assessment, the theater-level analysis, and the commander's assessment contain summaries that can be used to build executive policy papers. The theater commander's assessment is the top layer of the report, as shown in the figure.

⁶ A template for contextual assessment is presented in Appendix A. Appendix B provides a notional example of contextual assessment in practice.

Figure S.2
The Contextual Assessment Reporting and Analysis Process



NOTE: Theater-level analysis considers all reporting from battalion up to the theater report. The commander's report addresses both the theater-level report and theater-level analysis.