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Counterinsurgency Scorecard

Afghanistan in Early 2013 Relative to
Insurgencies Since World War II

Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, Beth Grill, Molly Dunigan

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Summary

The RAND report *Paths to Victory: Lessons from Modern Insurgencies* used detailed case studies of 71 insurgencies worldwide since World War II to analyze correlates of success in counterinsurgency (COIN). One of the core findings of that effort was that a case's score on a scorecard of 15 good factors or practices minus 11 bad factors or practices perfectly discriminated the outcomes of the 59 core cases in the data.¹ Cases in which COIN forces were able to maximize the presence of good factors and minimize the presence of bad factors resulted in COIN force success. Specifically, cases with a good-minus-bad score of +2 or greater were always won by the government, and cases with a good-minus-bad score of -1 or lower were always won by the insurgents.² The research found that all successful COIN forces have a scorecard score of at least +2 *and* that all successful COIN campaigns realized three specific factors: the disruption of tangible support to the insurgents, the demonstration of commitment and motivation on the part of both the government and COIN forces, and flexibility and adaptability on the part of COIN forces.

The current research effort involved developing and conducting an expert elicitation exercise to complete the scorecard for operations in Afghanistan in early 2013. We used an expert elicitation for two reasons. First, much of the available data on contemporary Afghanistan leave something to be desired in terms of reliability and validity. Discussion moving toward consensus among a panel of experts—many of whom have spent time in Afghanistan—is methodologically stronger than claiming certainty based on our own interpretation of tenuous data. Second, assessments of Afghanistan are potentially politically contentious, and an anonymous panel helps shield the analysis from some of that contention.

We asked a panel of 19 experts on Afghanistan to make “worst-case” assessments of the scorecard factors. According to the consensus results for the scorecard, eight good factors and six bad factors were present in early 2013 Afghanistan, for an overall score of +2. This represents an improvement over the score identified through a similar process in early 2011. A total score of +2 is equal to that of the lowest-scoring winning historical COIN forces, and having eight good factors is also consonant with historical success. However, only cases in which the insurgents prevailed had as many as six bad factors. Also concerning is the repeated observation

¹ The study considered a total of 71 cases, but these included instances of COIN campaigns fought “against the tide of history”—for example, at the end of the colonial period or apartheid—and one case of indeterminate outcome. This left the 59 core cases used for the analyses and as the foundation for the scorecard.

² Perfect discrimination of 59 historical cases is by no means a guarantee of perfect prediction across all possible cases. Full details of the historical research can be found in Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, Beth Grill, and Molly Dunigan, *Paths to Victory: Lessons from Modern Insurgencies*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-291/1-OSD, 2013.

by participants that many of the positive factors identified in early 2013 Afghanistan would be difficult for the Afghans to maintain after most international forces are withdrawn in 2014.

This report highlights two critical areas for improvement. These factors were assessed as absent in contemporary Afghanistan but found to be essential to success in historical COIN campaigns: (1) disrupting tangible support to the insurgents and (2) a demonstration (and improvement) of commitment and motivation on the part of the Afghan government and Afghan security forces.