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# From Insurgency to Stability

Volume I: Key Capabilities  
and Practices

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## Summary

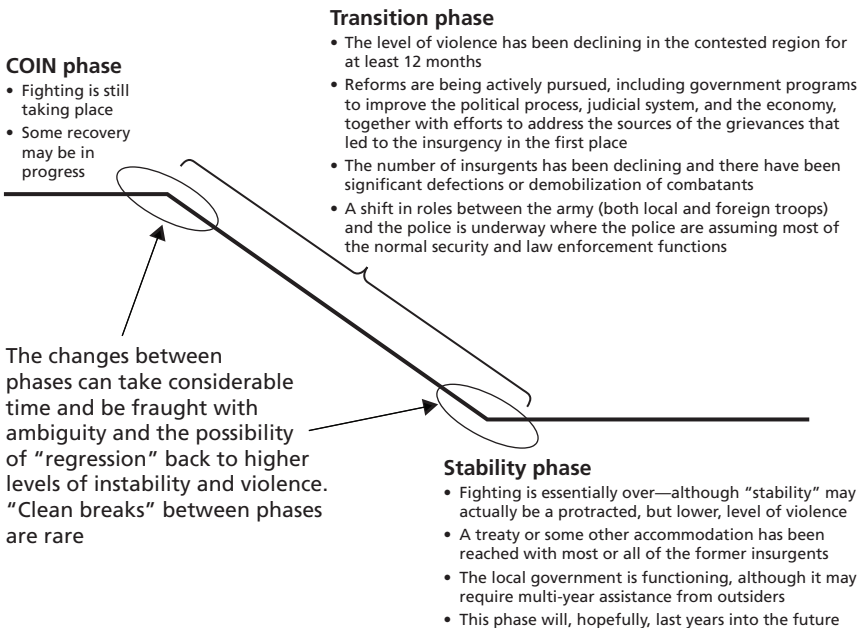
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There is no universally accepted criterion to determine how, when, and under what circumstances an insurgency can be said to have entered a transition phase toward stability. For purposes of this document, we define a *COIN transition* as the time and place between the counterinsurgency stage, in which the military takes primary responsibility for security and economic operations, and the stability and reconstruction phase, in which the police and civilian government agencies take the lead in providing security and services to the population. It can be considered to have started when the following are taking place:

- The level of violence has been declining in the contested region for at least 12 to 24 months. The number of insurgents and insurgent attacks has been declining and there have been significant defections or demobilization of combatants.
- Reforms are being pursued. These include government programs to improve the political process, establish an impartial and credible judicial system, reduce corruption, invigorate the economy, address religious or cultural discrimination, or remove other sources of dissatisfaction that resulted in part of the population siding with the insurgents.
- The population interacts with and supports the security forces and government representatives and assistance workers.
- The police forces of the government combating the insurgency are taking over responsibility for internal security from indigenous (and any foreign) military forces.

Determining how the indicators listed above are assessed or measured can be difficult. In many ways, each insurgency is unique, even if the insurgency legitimates itself at least in part on the basis of a universalistic ideology such as Communism or Islamism. The aim of post-COIN operations is to ensure that these conditions are followed by lasting peace and stability rather than a relapse into violence. The COIN transition can be said to be complete when the insurgency has been reduced to a level where the state is able to provide security to the population and perform its basic functions. Figure S.1 depicts the concept of COIN transition.

**Figure S.1**  
**Moving from COIN Toward Stability**



## Transition Scenarios Depending on Level of U.S. Involvement

The post–World War II era has seen the United States involved in many insurgencies and counterinsurgencies. In all cases, the degree of American involvement in counterinsurgency has varied considerably. Nevertheless, broadly speaking, two major categories of U.S. involvement in COIN can be distinguished: limited involvement and major involvement. There are also cases where there is no direct U.S. involvement. How the United States supports the COIN transition will vary accordingly.

In cases of limited U.S. involvement, the United States has provided advisors, trainers, and some material assistance to the security forces of the government that is combating an insurgency, but U.S. forces have taken no or a very limited direct role in operations against the insurgents. In addition to security assistance, it is likely that the United States also provided various types of “civil COIN” support to the local government. In Colombia and the Philippines, this level of U.S. assistance has been sustained over a period of years, and today both countries appear to be well along in the process of transitioning from decades-long counterinsurgencies toward much more stable situations.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are cases in which the United States has been deeply involved in the COIN effort, committing large numbers of military personnel to participate in combat operations against the insurgents. In these cases, the supported nation has usually developed considerable dependency on the United States in both the security and civil COIN areas. For this reason, the COIN transition process can be much more challenging than in cases of limited U.S. involvement, since the supported government often lacks the capabilities necessary to sustain the peace in the fragile post-COIN period. If U.S. support is removed precipitously during the transition phase, a major capability gap could easily emerge, endangering the transition.

The third category of counterinsurgencies encompasses those with no U.S. involvement, either because the government confronting the insurgency does not want the United States involved or because politi-

cal constraints, such as human rights concerns, preclude U.S. involvement. Even in cases where it is not directly involved, the U.S. government might not be indifferent to the outcome; for instance, if the government is fighting a radical Islamist insurgency, as in Algeria, the United States may provide some level of counterterrorism cooperation.

## **Transition Scenarios Depending on Outcome**

Transition scenarios also vary depending on the outcome. Different outcomes, in turn, have different implications for the nature of the transition.

When the outcome is a clear-cut government victory, the hand-off of security operations from the military to civilian agencies (or in cases of large-scale U.S. military involvement, from the U.S. military to civilian agencies and to the supported government) might involve only a mechanical transfer of responsibilities from military to civilian agencies.

However, when the insurgencies are terminated as a result of a negotiated settlement, there may be a need for a neutral third party to monitor the implementation of the peace agreement or ceasefire. If the United States was a party to the conflict or was heavily involved in support of one of the sides, it would be unable to play the peacekeeper or guarantor role. The United Nations can usually play this role. In El Salvador, for instance, the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) was set up to verify the implementation of the peace agreement. A similar situation might develop if there is a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan.

## **Hand-Off of Security Operations**

The hand-off of security and economic operations from the military to civilian agencies is the hallmark of a successful transition. If civilian agencies are capable of performing their functions, it means that the country combating the insurgency is transitioning to a more stable environment. Examples of such activities include police-led operations, peacekeeping, training and equipping local security forces, rees-



establishing civil authority, and developing institutional capacity and governance.

The hand-off of security and economic activities from the military to civilian agencies does not typically imply an abrupt end to the military's role in such operations. When the environment permits, military forces transition lines of operation to civilian agencies, which then lead the efforts. Although the military no longer has the primary responsibility for the conduct of operations, it continues at least some degree of field support for the efforts of civilian agencies, particularly when such agencies have a limited capacity to execute operations.

Handing off police activities to civilian agencies is one of the most complex transitions that the U.S. military faces during stability and reconstruction operations (SROs).<sup>1</sup> No single U.S. government agency leads and coordinates the different foreign police training, executive development, and mentoring programs. The situation is further complicated by the varying philosophies concerning requirements for police training that are held by the Department of Defense (DoD) and the myriad U.S. government civilian agencies involved in the task. It is essential that SRO planners identify requirements for the different types of police forces, based on the supported country environment. Finally, the U.S. government must determine as early as possible the supported country's priorities for police development in order to design police force training and equipping programs that can be sustained.

### **Hand-Off of Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Programs**

Certain types of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities and information systems are among the most critical capa-

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<sup>1</sup> Stability and reconstruction operations are defined in the U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 1 (2005) as follows: "Stability and reconstruction operations sustain and exploit security and control over areas, populations, and resources. They employ military capabilities to reconstruct or establish services and support civilian agencies. Stability and reconstruction operations involve both coercive and cooperative actions. They may occur before, during, and after offensive and defensive operations; however, they also occur separately, usually at the lower end of the range of military operations. Stability and reconstruction operations lead to an environment in which, in cooperation with a legitimate government, the other instruments of national power can predominate." The citation can be found in Chapter 3. In U.S. Army doctrine, "stability operations" are part of Full Spectrum Operations.

bilities needed to sustain a transition from COIN to stability. The decline in intelligence support that inevitably comes with the draw-down of U.S. military forces in cases of large-scale U.S. military involvement can contribute to a decline in the effectiveness of host nation security forces and place its recovery at risk. This consideration also applies to cases of limited U.S. involvement in counterinsurgency if U.S. ISR assets are withdrawn. Sustainability is a key factor. During the transition from COIN, U.S. planners must carefully consider the types of U.S.-developed infrastructure, equipment, and technology that the host country or U.S. government civilian agencies will be able to sustain.

### **Hand-Off of Economic Operations**

The hand-off process is no less complicated with regard to economic operations. If U.S. military forces or U.S.-supported government forces can defeat an insurgency or at least create an internal security environment characterized by manageable levels of threat, then there is a window of opportunity for civilian agencies to conduct economic operations. However, a nonpermissive security environment might compel military organizations to take on many tasks that are more typically executed by civilian agencies in partnership with international and nongovernment organizations.

As the Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) experience has made clear, the United States needs to develop structures and procedures to coordinate civil and military economic operations in transitions from COIN to SROs. Assessment tools should be developed to analyze the overall short- and long-term impact of projects on sustained economic development. Similarly, military and civilian leaders need a system that can provide a comprehensive view of economic development activity in an area of operations. The system should include visualization tools, not just data and statistics on projects.

### **Role of Contractors**

Civilian agencies by and large do not have sufficient capacity to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate the level of contract activity that can be associated with large-scale SROs. U.S. civilian agencies need

a unified system to monitor the status of deployed positions and to manage personnel so that positions are filled in a timely fashion. Similarly, there is need for a civil-military contract monitoring system. The system should enable newly arrived personnel to understand the status of ongoing projects and whether individual contractors are performing to the contract specifications. A status reporting and records system should limit the tendency of those personnel to “reinvent the wheel” and duplicate existing projects. It should further contribute to limiting waste and provide a window into corrupt practices, e.g., by identifying where project funds are expended and where performance is substandard.

Moreover, the supported government should be included early in U.S. transition planning. Such inclusion is vital for the supported government to become invested in the projects and sustain them as relations with the United States are normalized. SRO planning should also include a coordinated approach to integrate private sector and international participation into economic operations in a transition zone.

## **Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration**

The objective of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of combatants (DDR) is to consolidate the transition by ensuring the full reintegration of ex-combatants into a civilian setting. This may not be a realistic outcome in conditions of widespread poverty and high unemployment. In that scenario, an alternative goal is to break up the networks and unit cohesion of the insurgency. In such cases, however, many of the ex-combatants will likely turn to criminal or other types of violent activities.

If DDR is to succeed in its stated goal of reintegrating ex-combatants into society, the process should be integrated with and supported by a comprehensive set of post-conflict reconstruction and development projects. First, conflict in the targeted area must have completely halted or at least been reduced to a level that combatants feel sufficiently confident to give up their weapons. This will normally entail a ceasefire or nominal peace accord and the presence of a cred-

ible (and, therefore, impartial) deterrent force to ensure compliance. Second, in a best-case scenario, DDR should include all insurgent and informal armed formations and, in some cases, components of the government armed forces and government-sponsored militias. Third, DDR must be comprehensive. The stages of the process are interconnected, and the completion of each stage is essential to the success of the others. Finally, DDR programs must have sufficient funding to complete their implementation and cover unforeseen contingencies.

In addition to those cited above, other requirements for successful DDR include

- coordination and information sharing among agencies involved in the process
- accurate predeployment intelligence and intelligence coordination on the part of deployed monitoring personnel
- adequate language skills of personnel overseeing DDR
- a transparent disarmament process backed up by an effective inventory management system
- adequate temporary cantonment areas for disarming insurgents. The cantonment should be a short-term process to prevent the camps from becoming hubs of criminality and even insurgent re-recruitment
- separating combatants from their weapons, both because possession of weapons defined their former lives and to prevent small arms proliferation.

## **Police and Justice Functions**

Police and justice functions are at the core of political and social order, and they play a key role in the daily life of the populations for whom they provide basic security services. Policing and justice capabilities are particularly important in the transitional stage of COIN. During that period, when the government appears on the path to winning and levels of violence have been consistently decreasing, a strong and legitimate security sector can ensure that this trend continues.

The transition phase of COIN operations presents specific challenges. Police forces are normally not trained or equipped to conduct their duties in nonpermissive environments. Consequently, the transition between the military and the civilian police in the performance of law enforcement activities can suffer some delays, creating a security gap. The police may not be ready to take over even basic policing tasks. As the transition progresses, however, the environment should become less and less hostile, allowing the country emerging from the insurgency and international stakeholders to focus on the three main tasks of institution-building, routine democratic policing, and the training of indigenous police forces.

Expeditionary law enforcement is inherently challenging for the United States. With police forces that are placed under the authority of the states and lower jurisdictions and a limited number of federal agencies performing law enforcement tasks, the United States is not ideally equipped to perform police duties abroad or build the capacity of other nations. The United States also lacks the constabulary-type police force, such as the Italian Carabinieri, that has proven in the past particularly helpful in assisting states during the period of transition when basic policing coexists with the need for paramilitary capabilities.

Building a justice system is, on the whole, a more difficult and longer-term endeavor than building policing capabilities. It depends more on encouraging the adoption of processes, principles, and attitudes toward the law and legal institutions than on providing infrastructure, equipment, and technical skills. The human resource requirements pose a particular challenge. To perform their functions well, judges, prosecutors, and lawyers require high-level skills and education and, at the more senior levels, years of experience. They also require knowledge of their laws and procedures that cannot readily be transferred by foreign trainers or mentors. Unlike with police or corrections personnel, human capacity cannot be rapidly expanded in justice functions by bringing in new recruits. Realistic timelines for meeting justice personnel requirements may be inconsistent with COIN transition timetables.

## Contribution of International Partners

The vast majority of COIN transition operations since the end of the Cold War have taken place in a multilateral context. Even in cases where the United States provides the bulk of the military forces for COIN operations, other countries and international organizations have worked alongside the United States toward the same end. COIN transitions will therefore likely involve multiple actors: Allies, coalitions, and international organizations will often provide, in part or in full, the capabilities needed to ensure a successful transition from armed conflict to stability.

There are two key domains in which international partners may present a clear comparative advantage: the use and training of constabulary forces and the reform of ministries of the interior.

For some period of time, COIN transitions are likely to involve both the military and civilians performing law enforcement tasks simultaneously. Transitioning from a high-conflict environment to a more permissive one requires community policing capabilities and more-specialized capabilities for responding to civil unrest and insurgencies. Constabulary police forces are particularly useful in such hybrid environments because they combine the ability to do routine policing with capabilities for more demanding roles, such as providing riot control or special weapons and tactics (SWAT) teams.

The United States is not well positioned in this regard, but several of its allies are. Over the past 20 years, Italian Carabinieri and French Gendarmerie have been involved in a number of post-conflict stabilization operations. The recently constituted European Gendarmerie Force (EGF) builds on this experience and that of other forces, such as the Spanish Guardia Civil, the Portuguese Republican Guard, and the Dutch Marechaussee, to constitute a rapidly deployable force. Constabulary-type capabilities represent a pool of expertise that the United States could try to use more broadly through international and bilateral cooperation in COIN transitions.

The United States could also rely on international partners for institution-building, especially when it comes to reforming the interior ministry, which many countries put in charge of managing police

forces. Interior ministry reform may be an instance where U.S. allies could usefully contribute their expertise.

Although international partners can make valuable contributions to transition processes in these and other domains, it is important to recognize that involving allies or international organizations may cause its own problems, especially because it further complicates coordination.

Moreover, allied contributions to COIN transitions are naturally subject to domestic and international political constraints, just as contributions from international organizations are normally subject to constraints stemming from consensus decisionmaking and the particular culture and mission of the organization itself. Other constraints also exist, including geography and resource limitations, imposed either by the tempo of operations elsewhere in the world or the prevailing budgetary and financial climate of the contributing state. In short, the capabilities of allies, coalition partners, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations should not be viewed as assets that will always be readily available to the United States.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

From the discussion in this monograph, a series of strategies and recommendations can be derived, based on lessons learned and expert review of the challenges posed by the transition from COIN to lesser levels of violence. Our recommendations stem from the research presented here, as well as from work conducted by other RAND researchers and institutions. They are intended to facilitate the smooth transition of projects and activities in areas experiencing a transition from counterinsurgency to SROs.

### **Hand-Off of Economic and Security Operations**

**Hand-Off of Planning and Timelines.** In cases of major U.S. involvement in counterinsurgency, planning for the hand-off of security and economic operations within the U.S. government, and for transitioning those operations to the supported government's control,

should be firmly established within the evolving planning framework for SROs. Ideally, such planning should take place prior to the commencement of SROs. In addition, a methodology and related criteria should be developed to support civil-military estimates of the timeline for project transitions. The estimating process will likely require collaborative analysis by planners and operators working at tactical, operational, and strategic levels.

**Project Prioritization.** Cooperation between U.S. military and civilian agencies is also important for the prioritization of economic operations. Assessments will need to be made regarding which projects to sustain based on their contribution to the supported nation's immediate needs, as well as longer-term capacity-building requirements.

**Contractors as Vehicles for Transition.** As the threat environment improves, contractors may serve as vehicles for the transition from military to civilian responsibility. Civilian agencies may see advantages in the continuity of operations that could be achieved by maintaining DoD-contracted activities in place. To facilitate this transfer of responsibilities, DoD, the Department of State (DoS), and perhaps other agencies should evaluate whether processes and procedures can be developed to facilitate the hand-off of contract management from military to U.S. civilian agency control and eventually to agencies of the supported government.

**Involving National, International, and Private-Sector Actors.** Particularly where there is significant U.S. and international involvement in the transition process, the supported government and its institutions, international organizations, businesses, and nongovernmental organizations need to be integrated firmly into SRO planning wherever possible. DoD should work with DoS to evaluate mechanisms and processes to accomplish this integration.

**Estimating Host Nation Police Force Requirements.** DoD, DoS, and the Department of Justice (DoJ) should collaborate to develop methods for estimating requirements for building or rebuilding host country police forces. Consideration must be given to requirements for both constabulary-type police forces and those equipped and trained for more traditional law enforcement tasks. Planning should also



include the potential timing and manner of the transition from one type of force to the other, as appropriate.

**Information and Communications Technology.** DoD and DoS should collaborate to develop mechanisms for identifying databases and other information and communications technologies (ICT) that should be considered for potential hand-off, as well as the planning processes required to support these systems after the hand-off.

**Generating U.S. Government Civilian Expertise to Support Integrated SROs.** New mechanisms and associated resource support should be identified to enable the routine provision of civilian expertise to DoD for the conduct of stabilization and reconstruction exercises and operations.

**Evaluating Improved Linkages Between DoD and the Combatant Command.** DoD and DoS should explore whether technical or other measures can be pursued to strengthen current linkages and create new ones.

**Modifying IMS Planning Processes.** The Department of State Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) should work with interagency partners to modify the Interagency Management System (IMS) planning processes to make them more efficient and acceptable to other U.S. government agencies.

**National Security Council (NSC) Leadership of SRO Planning and Coordination.** A standing body of the NSC for SRO planning and execution should be established. This structural reform should be accompanied by a formalization of the S/CRS role and an elevation of its position within the DoS bureaucracy. The S/CRS, or its successor organization, could be the primary supporting agency to the NSC's new SRO organization.

**New Structures for Tactical-Level Civil-Military Integration.** The coordination accomplished by ad hoc interagency organizations in Iraq and Afghanistan should be evaluated for lessons learned. New structures for tactical-level integration are emerging and require assessment. U.S. civil and military authorities at all levels—tactical through strategic—need new tools that can provide a comprehensive view of the economic operations being conducted in their areas of interest.

## **Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration**

**Adequate Funding.** Programs must have adequate funding and resources to ensure that they meet their short-term goals and lay the groundwork for fostering the long-term process of post-conflict normalization.

**IT Contribution to DDR.** Appropriate application of information technology in the DDR process can help confirm the identity of the demobilizing insurgents, as well as identify them later if the need should arise. This could involve, for example, passing databases from the U.S. military to the various agencies that are responsible for the DDR process.

**Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW).** Any effective disarmament process involving the collection of SALW must be fully transparent and backed up by an effective inventory management system. Disarmament needs to go beyond merely decommissioning the arms and munitions stocks of former combatants to address—and check—the potential proliferation of SALW to criminals, renegade militants, and the wider civilian population.

**Cantonment.** Demobilized combatants should be processed and returned to their place of origin as quickly as possible. The more rapidly this occurs, the sooner peacekeepers can separate ex-fighters from the tools of war and introduce them to comprehensive civilian rehabilitation programs.

## **Police and Justice Functions**

**Establish or Reestablish Coverage of Entire National Territory.** During the transition phase, the priority of the police should be to establish or reestablish coverage of the entire national territory in order to restore civil order and deny geographical and human terrain to the insurgents. Capacity and sustainability are twin priorities.

**Constabulary Policing Capabilities.** There may still be a need to create constabulary-type police units as the military relinquishes law enforcement duties.

**Riot and Crowd-Control Capabilities.** In a situation where the government has not completely restored its authority over the country

or a particular region, the police need crowd and riot-control equipment. This includes lethal and nonlethal or scalable gear.

**Integrated Police and Judicial System Reconstruction.** Police and judicial reconstruction should not be the focus of separate efforts. Reinforcing police and justice capabilities should be an integrated effort because they build on each other to provide the basic services that the population expects from a functioning state.

### **Contribution of International Partners**

As noted above, there are political and other impediments to international participation in U.S.-supported transitions. Despite these impediments, there are measures that the U.S. government can take to enhance the prospects for cooperation with international partners. The United States is a major contributor in many of the international organizations that are most relevant for supporting COIN transitions. Washington has leverage to steer the policy of these organizations and to engage partners within these institutions. More U.S. engagement is also likely to trigger more support among partners. For instance, the United States could show its support by seconding staff for United Nations peacekeeping operations and encouraging its allies to do the same.

**Consider the Whole Transition.** U.S. policymakers need to conceive of the “transition” of tasks in these operations not only in terms of handing off responsibilities from DoD to DoS (as is currently the case in Iraq) or from U.S. agencies to local actors, but also of hand-off from U.S. agencies to international organizations.

**Encourage Further Development of Partner Police Capabilities.** The U.S. government can encourage and support ongoing international efforts to develop stability police forces for international deployments in specific ways. To reach beyond the Euro-Atlantic context, Washington could support training in countries that are major contributors to United Nations (UN) missions such as Jordan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia, as well as countries in Africa.

**Reinforce Cooperation in the Area of Integrated Rule of Law Missions.** The United States can contribute to and prepare to collaborate with the European Union (EU) and the UN in integrated rule of

law missions. For instance, the United States has cooperated directly with the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX). This could serve as a model case for future cooperation in civilian crisis management.

### **Cross-Cutting Recommendations**

**Unity of Effort.** In all areas of the transition, there needs to be sufficient unity of effort between the military and law enforcement agencies. It is vital that the military appreciates its own culture and training and does not assume that it can include policing as a lesser included contingency in its overall portfolio.

**Accurate Predeployment Intelligence.** Where there is international involvement in an SRO, participating countries need to have adequate information to form the basis of a threat and needs assessment that can then be used to inform the mission's mandate and the content of its training regime.

**Adequate Intelligence Coordination.** Once an operation commences, there needs to be adequate intelligence coordination to ensure unity of effort and mitigate traditional problems that arise from “stove-piped” information. Fusion centers that allow for assessments of the ongoing process are vital in this regard.

### **Technological Solutions**

**Nonlethality.** Technologies to affect behavior and control situations without violent or lethal force can prove particularly useful in COIN transition contexts, since excessive use of lethal force could be precisely the sort of behavior that can generate support for the insurgency or may contribute to reigniting it. It is important to note that what makes some weapons nonlethal is the way they are used, as much as their design. It is therefore crucial that proper training be administered to indigenous police forces who are given such weapons—and that accountability systems are in place within the police institution to discipline potential abuse. This is an area where U.S. technical assistance could be of great value.

**Identification Systems and Biometrics.** In COIN contexts, the distinction between insurgents and noninsurgents is critical. The

authorities' ability to distinguish between the two can be improved through such identification systems as biometrics, vehicle registration databases, license plate readers, and more generally any type of census data or other database that can keep track of the population at the village or neighborhood level. Systems providing reliable identification have also proven critical in institutional reform, for instance, in avoiding "ghost" police officers and managing the payroll properly.

**Communications.** The U.S. experience in Iraq demonstrated that there is a need for equipment, training, and mentoring that allow the supported nation's security forces and their international mentors to communicate without their exchanges being intercepted by insurgent forces, such as encoded FM radios, satellite phones, cell phones, and portable repeaters.

**Operational Mobility.** Operational mobility can be particularly challenging in countries with difficult terrain and inadequate infrastructure. In Afghanistan, air assets provided by the United States have been the object of competing demands from the different agencies in charge of training the security forces. This problem has been particularly acute in the context of counternarcotics efforts. Developing the rotary-wing fleet and associated training of local personnel, as has been done in Colombia, could provide more operational mobility to the forces of the United States and the supported country when operating in difficult terrain.

**Unmanned Aerial Vehicles.** A last point relates to the possible use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to help the United States or the supported government control borders. The United States already uses this technology domestically for this specific purpose. Insurgents are frequently backed by neighboring countries or use their territory as a safe haven; UAVs limiting their ability to cross the border to resume their activities could be key to ensuring that violence does not flare up again and the COIN transition phase remains on the path to stabilization.