

Leveraging Development Aid to Address Root Causes in Counterinsurgency

Balancing Theory and Practice in “Hold” and “Build”

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WR-983-USG
February 2013
Prepared for the U.S. Government

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Preface

This working paper examines the ways in which the U.S. military applies development aid to address popular root causes in the “hold” and “build” phases of counterinsurgency (COIN). It specifically examines three critiques of current practice, and explores the suitability of alternative paradigms for contemporary U.S. operations and doctrine. It also offers draft recommendations designed to help U.S. policymakers and practitioners improve the efficiency and effectiveness of development aid in COIN.

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Abstract

This working paper focuses on the application of aid money and resources by both military and civilian officials in the hold and build stages of western COIN doctrine, providing a review and analysis of selected expert criticism, case study examples of successes and failures, and recommendations to improve both theory and practice. This examination reveals serious flaws in the current U.S. approach to applying aid in the stabilization phases of COIN, but also reveals the lack of acceptable and generalizable alternatives to current practice. Possible alternatives to spending vast amounts of money to address root causes in COIN include: 1) tightly controlling aid in order to weaken insurgent “systems”; 2) spending money only in areas showing signs of stability; and 3) targeting aid only at elites in order to cut quid pro quo deals. The systems approach and elite theory approach offer reasonable tactical options but are politically unpalatable and do not address root causes of conflict. Targeting aid only in areas that are partly stabilized will improve efficiency, but takes a potentially valuable tool away from officials operating in more dangerous areas. Smaller footprint operations like those in Colombia and the Philippines offer greater efficiency and effectiveness for aid spending, but the conditions in these campaigns are not necessarily replicable in larger scale conflicts. An alternative to current practice for aid use in large-scale COIN is warranted.

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1. Introduction: Using Development Aid in Counterinsurgency

Western counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine revolves around three interdependent efforts: the government and its external sponsors must reduce the insurgent threat, address the popular root causes that sustain the insurgency, and they must also build the legitimacy of the host-nation government to the point that it offers a reliable and attractive alternative from the insurgents. U.S. service doctrine currently offers only one operational path to strategic victory in COIN, an approach that incorporates all three aspects of the western paradigm in sequence: clearing an area of insurgent forces, holding the area for a time to allow the government to establish a presence, and building security, governance, and economic opportunity in the area until it stabilizes. This approach is commonly called “clear-hold-build,” and it emphasizes the use of aid money and resources to address root causes in hold and build.¹ In this article I focus on the application of aid money and resources by both military and civilian officials in the hold and build stages of western COIN doctrine, providing a review and analysis of selected expert criticism, case study examples of successes and failures, and recommendations to improve both theory and practice.

Critiques of the U.S. approach to expending development aid in COIN are wide-ranging, but three articles stand out as particularly relevant to hold and build: Charles Wolf, Jr.’s 1965 *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency: New Myths and Old Realities*; Paul Fishstein and Andrew Wilder’s 2012 *Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship Between Aid and Security in Afghanistan*, and Mark Moyar’s 2011 *Development in Afghanistan’s Counterinsurgency: A New Guide*. Each of these challenges some aspect of current theory or practice and offers alternative approaches.² Selected case studies help to place these critiques in context and to test the alternative theories they propose.

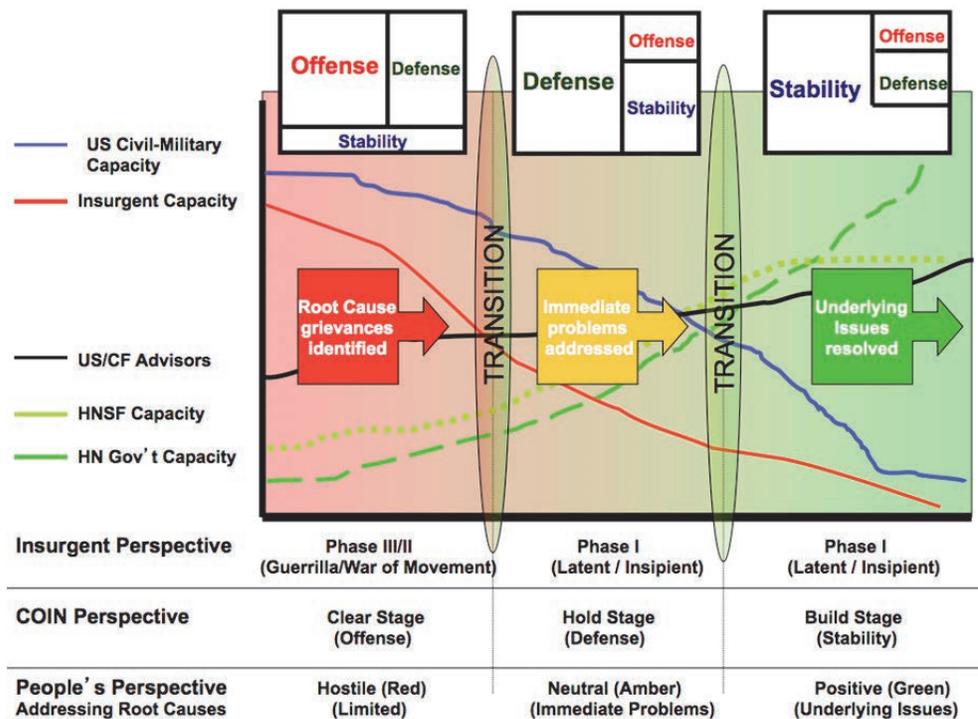
¹ There are many variations to this approach, to include shape-clear-hold-build-transition. Three documents represent the collective NATO and U.S. doctrinal approaches to COIN: 1) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Counterinsurgency*, February, 2011 (or current version), Chapter Five, Section V (not available to the general public); 2) U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, 2009, Chapter Ten; and 3) U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24/U.S. Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency*, 2006, Chapter Five. United Kingdom doctrine has been under revision, but the UK approach is available in Volume I, Part 10 of the British Army Field Manual, *Countering Insurgency*, 2009. Both JP 3-24 and FM 3-24 are under review and revision as of early 2013.

² I acknowledge that there is considerable literature addressing the efficacy of development aid, and a broader debate over best practices in aid investment from the geostrategic to the local levels. To stay focused on COIN, I use Wolf, Fishstein and Wilder, and Moyar as representative samples of the more narrow debate taking place over theory and best practices for applying aid in the midst of active military operations.

Hold, build, and the problem of root causes

Western COIN doctrine typically describes clear-hold-build as sequential operational phases designed to help transition insurgent held or controlled territory to the government. Figure 1 shows how the counterinsurgents alter the balance of control from the insurgents to the host nation over time, gradually forcing the insurgent military units to revert from Maoist Phase Three or Phase Two warfare to Phase I terror tactics as the government establishes legitimacy and stability. During the hold phase of counterinsurgency, insurgent presence and influence are steadily reduced while the counterinsurgents simultaneously apply aid (also called development or assistance) resources to address immediate needs like safety, fresh water, food, and electricity. With the insurgents reduced to a nuisance and immediate needs of the population met, the counterinsurgents can shift to the build phase, focusing resources – primarily in the form of aid money for projects – to address popular root causes. If root causes are adequately addressed in the build phase, and the government can establish its legitimacy, then naturally occurring and lasting stability should result.³ Oil spots of stability will spread outward, interconnect, and eventually create regions of stability. The host nation will gradually accrue mass popular support, and the insurgents will either be defeated or diminished to the point of strategic irrelevance.

Figure 1.1: Clear-Hold-Build Approach to Counterinsurgency



³ I define “naturally occurring” stability as that which does not require prolonged external support.

Source: Ulrich, 2007, slide 49⁴

This is the classic approach to defeat entrenched rural insurgencies that enjoy at least a modicum of popular support. Yet this is also a difficult process. It assumes that the external sponsor will be able to influence all, or nearly all aspects of the campaign, and that each of the organizational elements of both the external sponsor and the host nation will work in harmony towards a unified objective. As the U.S. military notes, clear-hold-build requires “lots of resources and time,” and so it depends on nearly unremitting political will over extended periods.⁵ Clear-hold-build doctrine rests on the assumption that the insurgents have transitioned to guerrilla warfare and therefore present a tangible, targetable threat. Perhaps most importantly, for clear-hold-build to evolve into lasting, pro-government stability, the counterinsurgents must both *identify* and *successfully address* the root causes that motivate common farmers, mechanics, and shop keepers to risk their lives in opposition to the government.⁶ Often, counterinsurgents use aid in hold and build to develop popular support for the government. But the idea that copious aid monies can be applied like a salve to address root causes in the hold and build phases of COIN is becoming increasingly unpopular.

Waning support for the use of aid in hold and build derives in great part from the growing impression that most aid money in Iraq and Afghanistan has been wasted or misdirected. A U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations evaluation of aid in Afghanistan summarized these concerns in a fundamental attack on the use of aid in stability operations:

We must challenge the assumption that our stabilization programs in their current form necessarily contribute to stability. The administration should continue to assess the impact of our stabilization programs in Afghanistan and reallocate funds, as necessary.⁷

Frustrations with the use of aid as a tool in U.S. COIN campaigns date back to at least the Vietnam War period. In 1965, as the U.S. was beginning to transition from a war of advisors to a war of attrition in Vietnam, Charles Wolf published a report condemning the use of aid to address root causes and offering an alternative approach to COIN.

⁴ Ulrich, Mark, Counterinsurgency Academy briefing, Tajji, Iraq, 2007.

⁵ U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps, 2006, p. 5-18.

⁶ RAND research of 89 post-WWII COIN cases reinforces the notion that addressing root causes is the best path towards achieving lasting stability, and that shortcuts to stability are rare; some kind of methodical stabilization program makes sense. See Ben Connable and Martin Libicki, *How Insurgencies End*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010.

⁷ U.S. Senate, *Evaluating U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan*, Committee on Foreign Relations, 112th Congress, 08 June, 2011, p. 4.

2. Charles Wolf, Jr. and the Systems Approach to Aid Distribution

Charles Wolf contests the fundamental notion of population-centric counterinsurgency in rural areas, claiming that insurgencies can and do thrive in the absence of popular support. Wolf describes insurgencies as *systems* that require resources like food, ammunition, and the means to organize their cadre.⁸ He believes that the U.S. and its western allies had, by 1965, created a set of syllogisms that engendered a misguided approach to COIN:

- 1) Both insurgents and the government require popular support to win.
- 2) Governments win popular support by providing aid to civilians in rural areas.
- 3) Therefore, socio-economic improvement programs, especially in rural areas, are essential for a counterinsurgency effort.⁹

But to Wolf, these assumptions are unrealistic: even a long-term counterinsurgency campaign of up to 25 years is unlikely to give the government sufficient time to alter the fabric of a society to the extent it would lead to lasting stability. He writes:

The attitudes are too deeply engrained, and the animosities and rigidities on which they are based too numerous and deep-seated to be eradicated quickly.¹⁰

Wolf argues that Americans are sentimentally predisposed to provide aid as a kind of feel-good approach to international relations, and the ways in which the U.S. has applied aid in historic cases reinforces the notion that aid programs are “stronger on symbolism and sentiment than realism.”¹¹ For Wolf, the application of development aid in the hold and build phases – aid that is designed to win over popular support for the government – can instead have negative consequences. Because these aid programs are likely to improve access to resources at the local level, the aid will also improve the insurgents’ access to resources. And by improving the living

⁸ Wolf takes Russell Ackoff’s general perspective on systems in his description of insurgent cadres. See, for example: Ackoff, Russell L., “Towards a System of Systems Concepts [sic],” *Management Science*, Vol. 17, No. 11, July 1971, pp. 661–671. Also see: Bertalanffy, Ludwig von, *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications*, rev. ed., New York: G. Braziller, 1974.

⁹ Wolf, 1965, p. 3.

¹⁰ Wolf, 1965, p. 8, underline original. He continues: “As far as counterinsurgency is concerned, increasing popular support and loyalty for the government by changing these attitudes is more likely to be a consequence than a cause of successful counterinsurgency.”

¹¹ Wolf, 1965, p. 4.

conditions of the local populace, the locals would more likely to try to find a comfortable accommodation with both the government and the insurgents; they would have little incentive to actively support the government or reject the insurgents.

Wolf proposes an alternative: counterinsurgency should be undertaken as a systems-oriented process designed to reduce insurgents' access to resources. Aid would only be applied in return for assistance in isolating the insurgent cadre:

Rural improvement programs, in order to be any benefit as an adjunct of counterinsurgency efforts, must be accompanied by efforts to exact something in return for whatever benefits and improvements are provided. [They must] explicitly relate to a kind of bargaining operation in which the government's improvement projects are exchanged for restrictions imposed on the availability of resources that the insurgency can draw from rural areas.¹²

Wolf's concerns regarding the misappropriation of aid once it has been distributed ring true. Certainly aid money and goods have gone to fund or supply insurgents in nearly every COIN campaign. Barring total post-distribution control of aid, insurgents will have some immediate or downstream access because they have access to the local economy and to the population. The closer the insurgents operate to the population receiving the aid, the more likely they are to benefit from that aid.

For example, from 2006 through 2009, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) invested over \$600 million in Iraq to support the Community Stabilization Program, or CSP. The CSP was an integrated set of programs and projects funded to develop local businesses, train prospective employees, and in general to improve local employment opportunities for the military aged males who would be most likely to join the insurgency. A somewhat glowing external audit for USAID claimed that CSP was "viable" in a COIN context, and that, "It is highly desirable that it be employed in other theaters after modifications to its current form and adaptation to local conditions elsewhere."¹³ Yet the same report noted that CSP and similar programs would benefit from increased oversight.

Lack of sufficient oversight reportedly led USAID and its contracted program managers to unintentionally channel CSP funding into the hands of insurgents who were operating amongst the population in the urban environment of Baghdad in 2007. An audit of CSP by the USAID Office of the Inspector General cited a source that claimed that millions of dollars from CSP projects were "fraudulently going to insurgents," and that between 40 and 50 percent of the funds

¹² Wolf, 1965, p. 7, underline original.

¹³ Glenn, Russell W., et al., *Evaluation of USAID's Community Stabilization Program (CSP) in Iraq: Effectiveness of the CSP Model as a Non-Lethal Tool for Counterinsurgency*, consultant report for the U.S. Agency for International Development, Vienna, VA: International Business and Technical Consultants, Inc., 22 July, 2009, p. 14.

spent to hire local Iraqis to clean trash from the streets were being redirected to fund insurgent operations. A former U.S. Army governance advisor in Baghdad, Colonel Louis Fazekas, stated that he saw reports “that a particular contractor was being blackmailed for a thousand dollars a day...It was feeding [the insurgents'] ability to continue to resupply and fight against us.”¹⁴ A USAID representative in the same area reportedly sent a letter to the CSP director in which he summarized the impact this kind of leakage was having on the hold and build missions in their area of operations: “The dire consequence is that American soldiers are killed attempting to secure areas being destabilized in part by misdirected American dollars.”¹⁵

Wolf drives home a critical lesson for hold and build operations: beware the unintended consequences of aid distribution. His observation that the counterinsurgents would be hard pressed to change popular perception in a way that would lead to long term stability and government victory also carry weight. Setting clear objectives for intangible and ill-defined objectives like “shift perception” and “improve legitimacy” proved difficult in Vietnam, Iraq, and in Afghanistan, and *assessing* meaningful shifts in popular support remains a nearly intractable challenge for both military and civilian staffs.¹⁶ Yet by abandoning the idea of addressing root causes in hold and build in favor of a systems approach to aid distribution (a coldly realist quid pro quo), Wolf seems to throw the baby out with the bath water. Robert L. Sansom spent eleven months conducting research on rural economics in the Mekong River Delta of Vietnam in the mid-1960s. Reinforcing the evidence presented by Rufus Philips (*Why Vietnam Matters*) and Jeffrey Race (*War Comes to Long An*), Sansom argues that the plight of the rural peasants in South Vietnam was visceral and generative: their perception of the government did shape the ways in which they related to and supported the insurgency or the government. Sansom argues that Wolf’s quid pro quo approach would be untenable, and he takes a contrasting stance. Sansom believes that in the case of rural insurgencies in which the population have land-based grievances, all aid is helpful regardless of spillage. In fact, he finds that it makes sense to push aid into insurgent held areas:

[In] an insurgent war it should be the policy of the counterinsurgency effort to give aid to the inhabitants of noncontrolled areas. For, to the extent that grievances are the source of discontent, and the insurgents gain support by appealing to these grievances, then policies to raise the incomes of the poor who are caught in the vicious circle of indebtedness and landlord control will tend to ameliorate the grievances and lessen insurgent support. Anything (fertilizer,

¹⁴ Quoted in: Mogelson, Luke, “Aiding the Insurgency,” *The Nation*, 31 May, 2010. As of 25 December, 2012: <http://www.thenation.com/article/aiding-insurgency>

¹⁵ Quoted in Mogelson, 2010. Similar claims are made regarding the expenditure of U.S. aid dollars in Afghanistan, although it has proven more difficult to track the downstream flow of aid dollars there due to the coalition’s relatively limited access to the Afghan rural population as compared with Iraq.

¹⁶ See Ben Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012.

motor pumps, tractors, land reform, and the like) that helps the farmers and laborers to escape from these impoverished conditions should be pushed through the market, which ignores security considerations, into the insurgent-controlled areas.¹⁷

The Viet Cong operating in the Mekong Delta were dependent at least in part on voluntary labor support from the population. By improving farmers' prospects, the government increased the amount of time the farmer was likely to devote to farming and selling produce, thereby decreasing his willingness to spend time or resources to support the insurgents. But in the Mekong, as in Long An, the government failed to provide adequate economic aid while the well-organized Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI) was able to employ "institutional techniques that brought economic benefits to the population in areas of the Delta over which they had little control." According to Sansom, the government essentially followed Wolf's systems approach in the Mekong Delta, preventing aid from reaching the population in Viet Cong controlled areas. This approach failed, while the Viet Cong achieved some success during his period of observation by appealing to root causes.¹⁸

Controlling aid and commodities in Malaya: A modified systems approach

Wolf and Sansom represent two extremes in the debate over the utility of aid in hold and build for COIN: either aid is a tool that should be tightly controlled and used only for discrete tactical advantage, or all aid is beneficial even if some of it flows to the insurgents or incidentally benefits the insurgency.¹⁹ The British and Malayan approach to aid distribution in the Malayan Emergency of the early 1950s was generally pursuant to Wolf's recommendations, but, arguably, also included efforts to address root causes. Two of the senior British leaders in Malaya applied Wolf's theory of quid pro quo as part of their overall approach to COIN, tempering the idea of strict systematization with at least some nods to developing popular support. In general the UK and Government of Malaya (GOM) approach to COIN was, as David French convincingly argues, focused far more intensively on population control than on generating inherent support and legitimacy.²⁰ The revered High Commissioner of Malaya from 1952-1954, Sir Gerald Templer, notionally a strong advocate for addressing the root causes of insurgency, halved the

¹⁷ Sansom, Robert L., *The Economics of Insurgency in the Mekong Delta*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1970, p. 244.

¹⁸ However, he notes that market forces allowed goods to reach these areas despite GVN controls. One would assume that the GVN would not have gained support of the population by restricting the flow of basic necessities to rural farmers. He also claims, "The Viet Cong example itself vindicates the conventional view that a successful insurgency can be and probably usually is a grievance-based movement." Sansom, 1970, pp. 244-245.

¹⁹ Sansom argues that the Viet Cong probably could not have taken advantage of increased aid for a variety of reasons. See Sansom, 1970, p. 244, footnote 30.

²⁰ See David French, *The British Way in Counterinsurgency, 1945-1967*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011.

daily rice ration to the town of Tanjong Malim for two weeks in order to squeeze information from the civilian populace.²¹ This is exactly the kind of ruthless bargaining envisioned by Wolf. But other British efforts, executed both by Templer and his predecessor, Sir Harold R. Briggs, had a popular veneer and were combined with what at least appeared to be genuine efforts to address root cause issues in hold and build.

The combined British and GOM Hunger Drive, or *Operation Starvation*, was integral to the massed resettlement of ethnic Chinese civilians into New Villages under the 1949-1954 Briggs Plan.²² As the government relocated civilians to their new and often desolate villages, they would seal them off from the outside world with fortifications and security patrols. The GOM then provided the civilians with food while encouraging them to restart their agricultural activities within the New Villages. In order to encourage the insurgents to surrender, and to coerce the civilians in insurgent-controlled territory, the GOM imposed strict controls over the distribution, transportation, and trade of foodstuffs. Many commodities were placed under government control, and prices and records of distribution were carefully regulated. John J. McCuen describes the degree of control leveraged on the resettled civilians in the “hold” phase of the COIN campaign:²³

The Government required shopkeepers to keep full records of customers and purchases. The number of shops could be restricted by closing some down. New villagers generally were prohibited from taking food outside their homes. All meals had to be eaten at home, with some exceptions for lunch to those who cultivated the more distant plots. In these cases, the people could carry out only highly perishable foods. Gate guards would open cans as the squatters left the villages to ensure that the food had to be eaten within a few hours. Sometimes central feeding facilities were organized to control food even more closely.²⁴

By controlling aid and goods, the counterinsurgents could simultaneously encourage popular compliance while depriving the insurgents of resources. However, commodity control during the hold phase of the Malayan Emergency was also intended to protect the population from exploitation by the insurgents. Because the insurgents were aware that the commodity controls kept the population supplied with only a subsistence level of food and medicine, any efforts to

²¹ Miller, Harry, *The Communist Menace in Malaya*, New York, NY: Praeger, 1954, pp. 206-210.

²² For a summary of the Briggs Plan, see Walter C. Ladwig III, “Managing Counterinsurgency: Lessons from Malaya,” *Military Review*, May-June 2007, pp. 56-66. One could argue that the plan ended earlier than 1954, but vestiges of the plan carried through to the end of the Emergency. See Karl Hack, “The Malayan Emergency as counter-insurgency paradigm,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 32, no. 3, (pp. 383-414), p. 3, for a timeline of the campaign.

²³ Malayan Emergency expert Karl Hack describes the period of the Briggs Plan execution as part of the “clear and hold” phase of the campaign. Once civilians were moved to New Villages, they entered the “hold” phase. See Hack, 2009, pp. 1-5.

²⁴ McCuen, John J., *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War*, Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1966, p. 162.

squeeze resources from the population were almost assured to generate resentment. Briggs stated, “You will now be able to say to the Communist extortionists when they approach you that you are no longer able to bring them food, money, or other supplies.” McCuen asserts that the resettled ethnic Chinese came to appreciate *Operation Starvation*, perceiving the controls as insulation against the insurgents. Therefore, at least according to Briggs and McCuen, the controlled distribution of aid contributed to the generation of good will and perceptions of government legitimacy.²⁵

It seems hard to believe that these resettled civilians would view such strict controls as generally beneficent. However Briggs, and later Templer applied these controls as part of a broader and integrated counterinsurgency plan. Briggs established committees to address immediate grievances during the hold phase of the plan. The Malayan Civil Service worked in close coordination with the British military forces to ensure that they were responsive to the immediate needs of the population in the troubled areas. Ethnic Chinese civilians may not have had recourse to solve all of their grievances, but they at least had outlet to which they could channel their complaints. And even if the aid controls had a limited positive effect on popular sentiment during the hold and subsequent build phases of the operation, they did have a noted impact on the insurgents. The Briggs Plan is probably the ideal example to showcase Wolf’s systems approach to defeating insurgent cadres.

Combined with aggressive counter-guerrilla operations and a particularly effective special police intelligence program, the resettlement and commodity controls forced the ethnic Chinese insurgents in Malaya to retreat to isolated cantonments where they might obtain sufficient supply. In October of 1951 the insurgents issued directives that essentially signaled their reversion to Maoist Phase I guerrilla warfare from what had been to that point a Phase II guerrilla war.²⁶ David French notes that by 1952 the insurgents were operating in rather ineffectual groups of five rather than larger, more organized, and more effective fighting groups. “Finding food consumed so much of their time and energy that the jungle fighters had no time to plan or carry out other operations. . . . In the jungle, the insurgents were left isolated, hungry, and dispirited.”²⁷ It would probably be safe to say that in the Malaya case, the British and GOM defeated the insurgents in part by controlling commodities and aid, while their limited efforts to address root causes with government support had at least a palliative effect on some segments of the targeted population.

While the control of commodities and aid in hold and build under the Briggs plan generated success in Malaya, and was replicated with some success in Kenya, the process of applying strict controls has limited generalizability. Sansom’s counterarguments to Wolf’s quid pro quo approach are relevant not only for Vietnam but also for other campaigns. While the British were

²⁵ McCuen, 1966, p. 163. Briggs is quoted from Miller, p. 189.

²⁶ Hack, 2009, p. 5, et al.

²⁷ French, 2011, pp. 123-124.

able to successfully relocate, isolate, and control the population in Malaya, this kind of strict control required an effective counterinsurgent force, a relatively competent government partner, time, and the kind of bygone political environment that allowed them to purposefully keep helpless civilians teetering on the brink of starvation in order to achieve a military objective. The British plan in Malaya also clearly benefitted from tight geography of the battlefield, within which they were able to isolate both the ethnic Chinese civilians and insurgents. The South Vietnamese were less successful with the Revolutionary Development and Strategic Hamlet programs, and the Indian Army failed in its efforts to replicate the British approach to address both the Nagaland and the Mizoram insurgency from the 1950s through the early 1970s.

In Mizoan, the Indian Army relocated entire villages of ethnic Mizo, providing aid and controlling the economies in the new villages. But instead of cutting off the insurgents from their support base and helping the Indians to address the root causes of the insurgency, the combined relocation and aid control program enraged the displaced Mizo. In his examination of the Mizoan insurgency, Vivek Chadha notes, “The relocation effort reinforced the MNF’s [Mizo National Front] narrative about India’s desire to destroy the Mizo way of life, allowed the insurgents and their sympathizers to accuse India of human rights atrocities, and harmed the ability of the Indian security forces to gather useful intelligence about the insurgency from an alienated and resentful local population.”²⁸ These kinds of controls – resettlement coupled with targeted, quid pro quo application of aid – backfired and probably set the Indian government back several years in their efforts to establish stability in their northeast. Walter C. Ladwig III identified a critical flaw in both the Nagaland and Mizoram campaigns, a flaw that had not crippled either the Malayan or Kenyan campaigns. Here he writes about relocation more broadly, but his insights are equally relevant to Wolf’s positions on the control of commodities and aid in hold and build:

As these relocation episodes demonstrate, coercion of the civilian population that appears to achieve a positive result in the short term can engender resentment and animosity, which can jeopardize the COIN effort in the longer term by driving people into the arms of the insurgents.²⁹

The northeast India campaigns point to the need to identify root causes before taking any action in hold and build that will affect popular support, at least in population-centric COIN. Paul Fishstein and Andrew Wilder of Tufts University argue that the U.S. has failed to identify the actual root causes of the insurgency in Afghanistan, and therefore has been misapplying its aid resources there.

²⁸ Vivek Chadha, “India’s counterinsurgency campaign in Mizoram,” in Sumit Ganguly and David P. Fidler, eds., *India and Counterinsurgency: Lessons Learned*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2009, pp. 28-44, p. 39.

²⁹ Walter C. Ladwig III, “Insights from the Northeast,” in Sumit Ganguly and David P. Fidler, eds., *India and Counterinsurgency: Lessons Learned*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2009, pp. 45-62, p. 58.

3. Fishstein and Wilder: Misapplication of Aid in Afghanistan

To better understand the relationship between aid and root causes in Afghanistan, Paul Fishstein and Andrew Wilder conducted interviews with 574 Afghan civilians, aid, government, and military officials in five provinces between 2008 and 2010.³⁰ While Wolf contends that there is no point in applying aid to address root causes, and Sansom believes that all aid is good, Fishstein and Wilder found that the application of aid – at least in Afghanistan – does not get to the true root causes of the conflict. Based on their interviews, they determined that Afghans most commonly rejected the government and/or supported the Taliban for political and social reasons, not for economic reasons. Aid programs in hold and build did not, therefore, achieve the objective of generating lasting stability because these programs were applied under the mistaken impression that the root causes were primarily economic. NATO, its allies, and non-governmental aid agencies have overspent in the mistaken belief that aid can be equated with increased stability, and in the process they have often created greater inequities and more instability.³¹

Fishstein and Wilder found that NATO and its allies applied aid in cooperation with a corrupt, unpopular, and generally ineffective Afghan government, so the aid failed to have the desired impact. Many programs have been tarnished by Afghan government corruption. In general, few non-Afghans had an appreciation for the actual consequences that aid distribution would spawn, so very often aid was improperly allocated. In an argument that speaks directly to the phasing of COIN in hold and build, Fishstein and Wilder state that aid in Afghanistan is misapplied to areas that are unstable in the belief that aid will *create* stability, and that areas showing signs of stability are therefore insufficiently supported; aid monies and supplies are finite. Costs for aid programs in what they call insecure areas are much higher because money has to be diverted to provide security for the aid programs, yet the value of aid in these areas is much lower than in stable areas because the money is more likely to be siphoned by corrupt officials, and is also more likely to unbalance local economies, create local rivalries, and increase inter-tribal and intra-tribal friction. Small amounts of carefully directed aid can have a limited, short-term impact on security, but large amounts of improperly directed aid will generate

³⁰ Fishstein, Paul, and Andrew Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan*, Boston, MA: Tufts University, 2011.

³¹ While they focus specifically on what they call political root causes, they describe what could be described as social issues (e.g. corruption) in the context of this discussion.

setbacks.³² Absent political (and social) reform, aid can be generally beneficial but will not create lasting stability.

There is little question that tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent in Afghanistan with little, or at least inadequate consideration for the impact the money would have on root causes of the insurgency. Some of the blame can be attributed to poor investment strategy, but identifying root causes in Afghanistan is a daunting task. While it was possible to identify one or two generalizable root cause issues in some of the Communist insurgencies in the 1960s and 1970s – often related to unfair land distribution or other colonial or dictatorial abuses – in Afghanistan, root causes and their potential solutions tend to be numerous and localized. A senior general officer at ISAF once asked an assembled group of experts to identify the root causes of insurgency in Afghanistan; neither he nor his staff had identified a theater-level set of causes they could address with their combined military and civil campaign.³³ When asked, and even when they are not asked, Afghan civilians complain about a wide range of serious issues from government corruption to lack of services to inadequate education to the onerous presence of foreign military forces. It is possible, therefore, to identify what U.S. doctrine refers to as “immediate problems,” and to apply aid money to address these problems. However, it is far from clear that either the U.S. military or civilian agencies in Afghanistan have identified a means to segregate immediate problems from root causes at any level, from tactical to strategic. As a result, aid money in Afghanistan is often used as a short-term fix in both hold *and* build without any indication that it will have lasting impact on stability.

RAND has conducted over 100 interviews of military personnel as part of ongoing research into the use of money at the tactical level of operations in Afghanistan.³⁴ Nearly all of the respondents have observed money wasted or misapplied in remote Afghan villages and in district centers. They reported building schools that were used by Afghans as animal stables or as personal homes, incidents of outright corruption by government officials and local contractors, abysmal construction quality, and other incidents of waste or fraud. However, nearly all of the interviewees saw value in applying aid money at the tactical level during hold and build. On many of the occasions that projects resulted in poor construction or fraud, they still saw immediate gains in stability and, perhaps more importantly, in their rapport with the local communities. Aid projects often generated good will and resulted in an increased flow of intelligence information from the local populace. While the respondents believed that it was necessary to tightly control spending to reduce fraud and abuse, they also believed that money had value when it was applied to *immediate problems*. Few of the respondents, though, believed

³² Fishstein and Wilder, 2011, pp. 3-7. They also note that aid is “good in and of itself,” a point that seems to be in clear contradiction to their other findings.

³³ This anecdote is derived from direct observation by the author.

³⁴ Details of this research are not releasable until the research is complete. Distribution of the complete research findings may or may not be limited to U.S. military and government personnel.

that their aid money had convincingly addressed root causes or produced lasting stability. And many respondents made it clear that the Afghans abused the very simple process the military and civilian officers tend to rely on to target aid money: asking Afghans to identify their own root causes of instability. The most widely used and recognized tools for identifying root causes in Afghanistan are the District Stability Framework (DSF) and a subsidiary questionnaire, the Tactical Conflict Assessment and Planning Framework (TCAPF).³⁵

Applying the District Stability Framework approach in Nawa, Afghanistan

Taking Fishtein and Wilder's critique to heart, USAID developed the DSF tool to help operational commanders and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) identify *sources of instability* and *needs*.³⁶ The DSF differentiates between sources of instability and needs in the same way that the military differentiates between immediate problems and root causes: the former are short term issues that affect security in the hold phase of COIN, and the latter are long term issues that can be addressed during the build stage of COIN. The authors of the DSF state clearly in their brief on the program that most of the assumptions about aid in COIN are inaccurate. Drawing directly from Fishstein and Wilder, they identify the following assumptions about COIN as myths:³⁷

- Reconstruction and “modernization” efforts are stabilizing
- Poverty causes instability
- More jobs equals fewer insurgents
- Money and projects win “hearts and minds”
- Extending the reach of the central government fosters stability

The DSF envisions aid as an integral part of an overarching, localized hold and build stabilization strategy that includes all kinetic and non-kinetic “lines of operation,” or stabilization focus areas, typically security, governance, development, and sometimes rule of law. Implementers – both military and civilian – gather information on sources of instability and needs from many sources, to include intelligence reporting. Once the issues are identified, a

³⁵ TCAPF is a precursor to DSF, and has now been modified and rolled into the DSF model. TCAPF was derived in 2006 from the USAID Conflict Assessment Framework, while DSF was developed during the post-2009 surge. DSF builds on the TCAPF model, and most parts of DSF were promulgated to operational units in TCAPF briefings prior to or during the surge in Afghanistan. See U.S. Agency for International Development, *Tactical Conflict Assessment and Planning Framework*, briefing, undated; and U.S. Agency for International Development, *Stabilization and the District Stability Framework (DSF)*, briefing, USAID Office of Military Affairs, 07 July.

³⁶ For insight into the PRT role in aid distribution in COIN, see: Malkasian, Carter, and Gerald Meyerle, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams: How Do We Know They Work?*, Strategic Studies Institute, March, 2009. As of 08 January, 2013: <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/>

³⁷ USAID, 2010, slide 8.

logical, sequential, and multifaceted plan is developed to address the issues with appropriate means, to include aid. This process is depicted in Figure 2, which also shows how the implementation team can fix and track indicators of progress to determine the efficacy of the plan.

Figure 3.1: District Stability Framework Analysis and Design

		Analysis				Design		
Source of Instability	Causes (Perception)	Causes (Systemic)	Objective	Impact Indicators	Impact Indicators Data Sources	Activities	Output Indicators	Output Indicator Data Sources
Lack of physical Security	ANSF are corrupt and incompetent	Lack of adequate leadership by ANSF	Improve the visibility and reputation of the ANSF	Increased public confidence in ANSF	PMT Report	Promoting work of ETT with ANSF through an IO campaign (partner with mil counterparts)	Recruitment campaign developed	PMT Report
	ANSF are not visible in Sirkani's villages	Too few ANSF		Higher frequency of patrols	TCAPF Highway Police Report		Road constructed	TCAPF Highway Police Report
	ANSF does not protect the population	Lack of physical access to population and lack of ANSF capacity and resources		Increased bazaar activity	Intel Reporting		10 campaign developed	Intel Reporting
				Reduced acts of violence against locals	Interviews		# of 10 messages	Interviews
			More night road movement	Patrol Reports	Support development of ANSF recruitment campaign	Direct Interaction		
				ANSF Records	Construction of Ganjgol roads	Patrol Reports		
				Shuras		ANSF Records		
						Shuras		

Source: USAID, 2010, slide 19

This requires a whole of coalition approach to the problem of stability; USAID controls very few of the resources necessary to identify problems and needs or to track progress. The four-part TCAPF questionnaire was designed to elicit information regarding these problems and needs from rural Afghans, but it requires the full participation of military commanders and their infantry and civil affairs teams operating in the field. Someone has to get out to the villages to find out what is wrong.³⁸ DSF has been adopted and applied unevenly by military units because it is a USAID model and not universal military doctrine, but it has been used with what could be described as tactical or operational success in several cases.³⁹ Most notably, Marine Lieutenant Colonel William McCollough and his First Battalion, Fifth Marine Regiment in Nawa, Helmand

³⁸ As of early 2013, the TCAPF questions are now called the Tactical Conflict Survey. See U.S. Agency for International Development, *District Stability Framework Quick Reference Guide*, briefing, U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, undated. As of 05 January, 2013: https://www.pksoi.org/document_repository/misc/DSF_Quick_Reference_Guide_Dec_2010-COP-239.pdf

³⁹ DSF has been incorporated into some military manuals, but these were recent inclusions and they do not affect all U.S. military organizations operating in Afghanistan.

Province, used TCAPF questions and a DSF-style approach from 2009 through 2010.⁴⁰ Since late 2009, Nawa has been aggressively publicized as a COIN success. In early 2010, then-Major General Michael Flynn highlighted the population-centric approach taken by McCollough and his intelligence staff in his *Fixing Intel* report, and a Marine company commander operating in Nawa in mid-2011 stated, “This is what winning looks like.”⁴¹

McCollough brought his battalion into Nawa to replace a much smaller British garrison that the insurgents had placed under siege. Taliban fighters tested the Marines immediately and continued to disrupt Marine operations as the battalion settled in to patrol the district center and surrounding rural areas. McCollough had prepared his unit prior to deployment to view the population-centric part of the mission as their first priority, and counter-guerrilla operations as a secondary priority.⁴² When they were operating according to plan, the Marines engaged with the locals as often as possible, asking them to identify their problems and to describe possible solutions. These problems and solutions were at first security oriented, but as the Marines settled in to a hold and then build approach, the Afghans began to request the coalition direct aid to build services and address political and social grievances. In a 2009 interview, McCollough stated:

The No. 1 thing was security...After security, four things came up in talks with the Afghans: roads, clinics, schools, canals. How can you argue with that? That's what America represents to the world.⁴³

Once they were able to create a security bubble the Marines moved quickly into the hold phase of the operation. They fanned out and applied the TCAPF questionnaire, and also their intelligence assets to identify issues that they might exploit to build rapport and improve government legitimacy. The Marines and the members of the Helmand PRT working in Nawa uncovered an array of concerns ranging from the kind of practical needs listed by McCollough, above, to more complex but equally pressing concerns with rule of law, corruption, and

⁴⁰ McCollough did not necessarily use DSF, but his approach mirrors the DSF framework in many ways. He did use TCAPF and his experience is highlighted in the DSF briefing.

⁴¹ See Michael T. Flynn, Matt Pottinger, and Paul D. Batchelor, *Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant*, Center for a New American Security, January, 2010, pp. 13-15; and Millham, Matt, “Despite lingering reliance on U.S. aid, Afghanistan’s Nawa district a model of ‘transition,’” *Stars and Stripes Online*, 28 May, 2011. As of 04 January, 2013: <http://www.stripes.com/news/middle-east/afghanistan/despite-lingering-reliance-on-u-s-aid-afghanistan-s-nawa-district-a-model-of-transition-1.144926>

⁴² William McCollough, discussion with author, 2010.

⁴³ Quoted in Tony Perry, “Marines’ success in Afghanistan has a history,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 2009. As of 04 January, 2013: <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/dec/31/world/la-fg-afghan-insurgency31-2009dec31>

economic development.⁴⁴ Flynn et al. describe how McCollough's all-in approach to population-centric hold and build worked in practice:

The battalion commander [McCollough] partnered with the district governor, traveling with him constantly and participating in impromptu meetings with citizens to build their confidence in Afghan and U.S. security. To demonstrate the benefits of working with the Afghan government, the battalion facilitated development projects that addressed grievances identified through coordinated surveys of the populace by Marines and civilian officials. These efforts paid off. The district governor persuaded elders to reconstitute a traditional council featuring locally selected representatives from each sub-district...A visitor to the district center of Nawa last June, before the battalion arrived, would today not recognize the bustling marketplace. Farmers who last summer would have said nothing upon spotting the Taliban burying a roadside bomb now chase them away themselves.⁴⁵

The 2009-2010 Nawa operation is a model of doctrinal population-centric aid application in hold and build. McCollough's focus on local issues, his application of all available assets – including intelligence assets – to identify and address popular concerns, and his efforts to integrate aid into a holistic framework represented the best aspects of the DSF methodology and addressed many of Fishstein and Wilder's critiques. Marine and PRT officers applied aid in Nawa not only in support of service improvement, but also to improve local governance and to build a judicial system to compete with the Taliban's local monopoly on justice. In other words, they tried to leverage aid to address the kinds of political and social issues that Fishstein and Wilder found were most likely to represent root causes.

However, as with the Malayan case, the generalizability of the Nawa case is limited. In many ways McCollough and his Marines fell in on the ideal proving ground for population-centric COIN. Nawa is located in the Nawa-y-Barakzai district of Helmand, the name indicating that it is populated mostly by Barakzai tribesmen. The Barakzai tend to hew to the status quo ante, and due to tribal lineage are more likely to benefit from government success.⁴⁶ And the Helmand

⁴⁴ Fearon, Kate, and Derek Griffiths, *Nawa Community Council Planning Workshop: A Bridge Between Community and Government*, Provincial Reconstruction Team Helmand, Lashkar Gah, Afghanistan, November 2009.

⁴⁵ Flynn et al., 2010, pp. 14-15.

⁴⁶ When asked to describe the disposition of the Barakzai, RAND's Arturo Munoz provided the following insights: "The Barakzai are part of the Zirak Pashtun confederacy which tends to control the best agricultural lands irrigated by rivers. Nawa-y-Barakzai fits this pattern; it is next to the Helmand River. The Barakzai tend to be satisfied with the status quo, tend to be more hierarchical, and tend to be pro-government, although there are exceptions. The Panjpai Pashtun confederacy tends to live in the deserts or mountains that are not good for cultivation. They are poorer than the Barakzai. Therefore they tend to be less satisfied with the status quo and thus more willing to rebel. This is not axiomatic however...Moreover, in Nawa-y-Barakzai the situation is complicated by the tremendous economic importance of poppy growing. The powerful men connected with the drug trade (as well as local farmers) will support whoever protects their key economic interests whether that be the government or the insurgency. It should be kept in mind that Afghanistan's kings going back to the founder of Afghanistan in the 18th century have

PRT described Nawa as a place that might thrive with increased security and *without* external aid. When the PRT arrived in Nawa in 2009, it was a “relatively affluent district, with green fields” fed by a decent canal system, sustaining a population that was collectivist and in many ways self-sufficient.⁴⁷ Flynn et al. wrote that, “various chips had to fall the right way in order for our forces to enable this positive turn of events.” They go on to note that in 2009, McCollough benefitted from the support of a charismatic district governor, and that there was approximately one Marine or Afghan security force member for every 50 citizens.⁴⁸ Even the district governor of Nawa-y-Barakzai stated, “Nawa is not like the rest of Afghanistan. It is a great success because many things have happened here that have not happened in other places.”⁴⁹ One of these “things” was the distribution of considerable U.S. aid money in a generally receptive and well-controlled area.

And while the near-term success in Nawa is indisputable, events have yet to play out in a way that will indicate whether Nawa will enjoy lasting, naturally occurring stability. Just as the service members in the RAND interviews warned of creating dependency with aid, the PRT warned that aid distribution in Nawa was likely to create a dependency that could not be sustained over time, and might be counterproductive. There is no way to empirically prove that any of the aid applied in Nawa went towards addressing root causes vice immediate problems. McCollough and the PRT had to use their professional judgment as they selectively applied their aid resources. For example, McCollough lists education as a critical issue that could be addressed with aid, but the PRT believed that the Afghans in Nawa had an almost mystical appreciation for education. They found that:

[T]here is an inflated belief in education being a panacea for all social ills – the behavior of the ANP, crime in general, juvenile delinquency, economic prosperity: the view is that none of these would occur if the population were educated. Education does have a transformative capacity, but not to the degree that Helmandis anticipate.⁵⁰

So while the Afghans in Nawa might have been satisfied in the near term as the coalition built schools in Nawa, the schools might not have the kind of long-term impact anticipated by either the Afghans or the coalition. And there is no clear evidence that some, most, or all people

generally been either Barakzai or Populzai, both from the Zirak confederacy. That is another indication of the pro-status-quo, pro-government orientation of this tribal group.” Arturo Munoz, email with author, 05 January, 2013.

⁴⁷ Fearon and Griffiths, 2009, p. 20.

⁴⁸ Flynn et al., 2010, p. 14.

⁴⁹ Chandrasekaran, Rajiv, “Nawa turns into proving ground for U.S. strategy in Afghan war,” *The Washington Post*, online article, 12 December, 2010. As of 05 January, 2013: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/11/AR2010121103041.html>

⁵⁰ Fearon and Griffiths, 2009, p. 8.

in the district who were supporting the Taliban did so because they lacked educational opportunities or the benefits they might accrue from education, so there can be no clear evidence that aid applied to build schools was aid applied towards addressing root causes. This brings into question at least part of the DSF framework, and also U.S. doctrine: it is not possible to consistently separate *sources of instability* from *needs*, or in DoD parlance, *immediate problems* from *root causes*. Further, the indicators of progress identified by USAID show at best a general correlation and not causative proof that aid led to either near-term security or long-term stability.

The DSF framework attempts to address the issue of impact assessment – another of Fishstein’s and Wilder’s gaps – by tracking input and output indicators, and other indicators of stability over time. Figure 3 shows a DSF assessment of “more is better” indicators that are purported to show a causal relationship between the expenditure of aid and improvements in stability. In this notional case, more night road movement is equated with greater freedom of movement, and this is averaged with improvements in government legitimacy.⁵¹ Based on these metrics the counterinsurgent team repositions its aid resources to target problem areas.⁵² Yet even the updated version of the DSF assessment process is fundamentally flawed; assessment is the weakest link in the overall framework.⁵³ Essentially, because there is typically no way to determine causation between the application of any resource and any kind of output or outcome, there is no way to determine the value of aid or other specific resources in hold and build. Further, averaging dissociated or loosely associated quantitative indicators compounds the problem. Experts on COIN assessment have determined that this kind of quantitative averaging for assessment is dangerous and does not support effective decisionmaking.⁵⁴

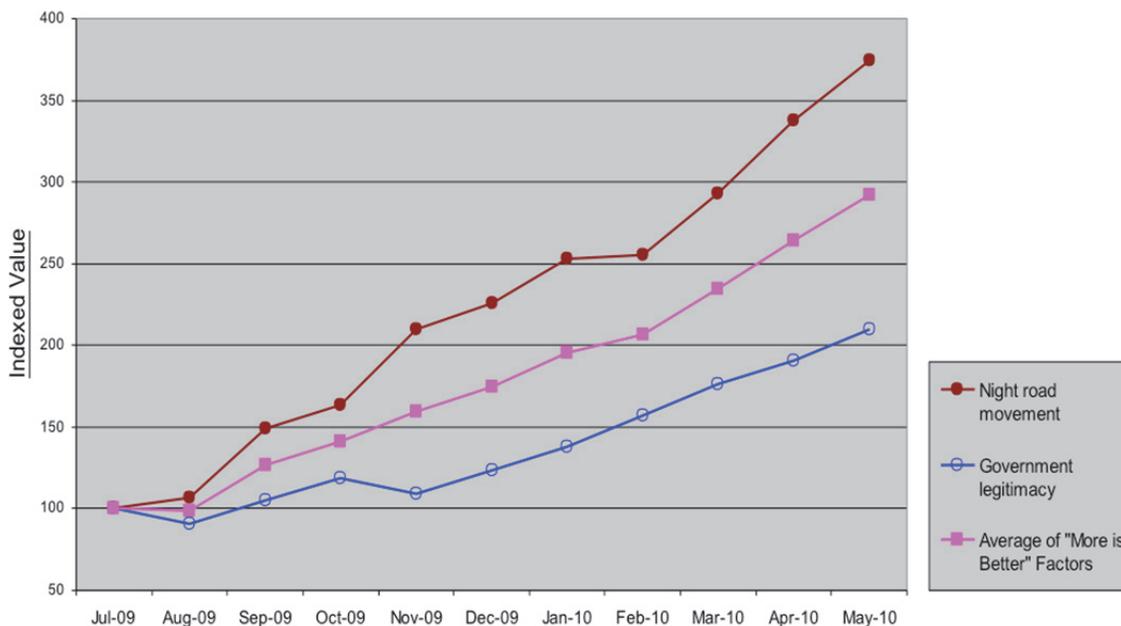
⁵¹ The belief that more movement is either a greater good or that this movement could be associated with legitimacy is questionable at best. See Ben Connable, et al., *Assessing Freedom of Movement for Counterinsurgency Campaigns*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012.

⁵² This recommendation can be found in the speaker notes for slide 22 of this official USAID briefing.

⁵³ Figure 3 is taken from an early brief of DSF. More recent but more concise briefings are available online. For example, see the USAID DSF Quick Reference Guide.

⁵⁴ For example, see: Stephen Downes-Martin, “Operations Assessment in Afghanistan is Broken: What is to be Done?” *Naval War College Review*, Autumn 2011, vol. 64, no. 4, pp. 103-125; Jonathan Schroden, “Why Operations Assessments Fail,” *Naval War College Review*, Autumn 2011, vol. 64, no. 4, pp. 89-102; and Ben Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012.

Figure 3.2: District Stability Framework Output Assessment Example



Source: USAID, 2010, slide 22

In the case of Nawa, violence declined as governance, popular perception of the coalition and the Afghan government, and local economic indicators rose. Therefore, according to the DSF framework the overarching DSF approach, in which aid plays a key role, has resulted in improved stability. But at best these kinds of quantitative improvements over time show correlation with the success of DSF, and these improvements may be short lived. While there may be a reasonable correlation between coalition actions and various improvements, there is no way to prove that any one part of DSF or the whole DSF approach caused anything to happen. Worse, by separating information gathering, analysis, action, and then assessment along distinct lines of effort, DSF reinforces the unhelpful notion – one that Fishstein and Wilder convey in their report – that political and economic issues are discrete. In most cases economic issues are also political issues, or grow into political issues. Viewing problems more holistically would seem to make better sense than separating efforts and assessment along easy to digest but necessarily artificial lines of operation.

Despite the desire on the part of many counterinsurgents to create irreversible stability (an objective in, for example, both NATO and Colombian COIN plans), there is probably no human condition that is definitively irreversible other than death. There are already indications that the very real gains in security established by the Marines and civilian partners in Marjah, another focal point for U.S. COIN in Helmand, are under threat due to the inability of the Afghan government to establish local or national legitimacy.⁵⁵ A Marine commander there recognized

⁵⁵ For example, see Associated Press, “Afghans in Marjah prefer Taliban rule,” 11 December, 2012. As of 06 January, 2013: <http://www.sfgate.com/world/article/Afghans-in-Marjah-prefer-Taliban-rule-4110400.php>. Alternate

that absent continued aid, Marjah might gradually slide back into an unstable state.⁵⁶ One senior shura member in Marjah stated, “The Afghan government is like a generator. The foreigners have provided enough fuel so that it will run until 2014. If they don’t refill the fuel tank, it will stop working.”⁵⁷ Similarly, as the Marines withdraw from Helmand, Nawa will almost certainly suffer from the withdrawal of aid due to the dependencies created during hold and build. And Nawa probably cannot exist as a small oil spot of success if southern Afghanistan reverts to Taliban control or influence, or if the Afghan government collapses.

DSF is one of the most thoughtful and comprehensive tools yet developed to address root causes in COIN, but it is only a tool and not a solution. While it provides a framework for thinking through a holistic approach to using aid in hold and build operations, it cannot guarantee the availability of the kinds of resources necessary to execute such a complex and demanding plan. Most importantly, despite providing several checklists and cross-referencing techniques to identify root causes, the actual identification of root causes boils down to professional observation and judgment. There is no magical formula to either help counterinsurgents identify root causes (or segregate them from “problems”), or to help counterinsurgents understand when they are being effective at addressing those root causes. Root causes can and do change over time, and are often different from place to place even within small sections of a larger COIN theater. Many Afghans, and also civilians living through insurgencies elsewhere, may not be able to accurately articulate their own reasons for supporting the insurgency or rejecting the government. Therefore, even with highly competent military and civilian officials, adequate resources, and time, any forecast of the long-term impact of aid will always reflect a high degree of uncertainty.

spelling for Marjah is *Marjeh*. This observation is based on English-language open source reporting, and there is most likely some contradictory or clarifying evidence available in classified channels or in local Pashtun-language sources.

⁵⁶ Bowman, Tom, “Former Taliban Stronghold Faces the Post-U.S. Future,” *National Public Radio*, online article, 22 May, 2012. As of 06 January, 2013: <http://www.npr.org/2012/05/22/153282627/afghan-forces-prepare-for-post-u-s-future>

⁵⁷ Quoted in Alissa J. Rubin, “In Old Taliban Stronghold, Qualms on What Lies Ahead,” *The New York Times*, 08 January, 2013. As of 09 January, 2013: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/09/world/asia/in-old-taliban-strongholds-qualms-on-what-lies-ahead.html?hp>

4. Mark Moyar: Aid, Elite Theory, and Leader Centric COIN

To avoid these and other problems, Mark Moyar recommends an alternative to addressing root causes with aid. Instead of focusing aid on the population, Moyar recommends targeting aid at carefully selected elites who can then influence the population in a way that satisfies counterinsurgency objectives. Moyar, who like Charles Wolf is a critic of population-centric COIN, proposes a *leader-centric* model that focuses on the need for good leadership within the coalition, and on shaping leadership in local communities and within the insurgency. Focusing on Afghanistan, he argues that the population – farmers, schoolteachers, mechanics, et al. – care most about security, and will side with anyone who can provide security. Population-centric COIN places governance first, but security is preeminent for “people living amidst an insurgency.”⁵⁸ Moyar writes:

The population is generally inclined to back the side that has a stronger armed presence in their village or neighborhood because that side is more likely to harm them for supporting the other side, more likely to prevent lawlessness, and more likely to prevail in the end.⁵⁹

After security, they care more about governance than about development; he concurs with Fishstein and Wilder that the root causes of instability in Afghanistan tend to be political rather than economic. While development can be an important tool, its value is almost wholly dependent on security and good governance. In agreement with Wolf and in direct counter to Sansom, Moyar believes that any aid directed to areas that are neither secure nor at least adequately governed is wasted and can be counterproductive.

Where good governance is lacking, development money often finds its way into pockets of corrupt officials or shady businessmen. Development spending without good governance also exacerbates corruption within the government, by encouraging unscrupulous and rapacious individuals to enter into government service...Some senior Afghan officials have become so addicted to the money they skim from aid programs that they abet the insurgents as a means of convincing foreign donors that additional spending is required.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ COIN doctrine places security first in its list of priorities, and clearly states that development cannot lead to improvement absent security. Therefore, Moyar’s assertion regarding population-centric COIN is not accurate.

⁵⁹ Moyar, Mark, *Development in Afghanistan’s Counterinsurgency: A New Guide*, Orbis Operations, March 2011, p. 4.

⁶⁰ Moyar, 2011, p. 5.

The leader-centric solution to these problems is to target aid at the Afghan elite, shifting the quid pro quo from the people to their leaders. Moyar believes that the best counterinsurgents focus on finding the “right” elites, and then plying them with targeted, small-scale aid projects in order to obtain their support.

Within any society, only a small minority of the population has the talent, resolve, and social status to organize economic, political, or military activities that will antagonize violent insurgents. The members of this elite group must be co-opted or else rendered incapable of abetting the insurgents...development spending can have a greater impact in co-option [of elites] than in mobilization [of the populace]. It can be concentrated on the few individuals capable of leading the rest of the community...⁶¹

Moyar uses Iraq circa 2006 and 2007 as a primary example of successful elite influence in hold and build. In his brief interpretation of the war, military commanders and civilian officials were prohibited from using aid to influence local leaders directly, or from establishing any quid pro quo with Iraqi elites. This policy caused many Iraqi elites to side with the insurgency. In a notional example, he describes a command spending \$25,000 on a school to benefit the community but failing to coerce anyone from opposing the insurgency because the project does not empower local leaders. Eventually, Moyar writes, the prohibition was lifted and the coalition was free to execute quid pro quo deals with Iraqi leaders, exchanging aid money for intelligence information or the provision of young men for recruiting drives. “If the tribal leaders dragged their feet on taking action against the insurgents, the United States could threaten them with a withdrawal of aid, and such threats often achieved the intended effect.”⁶²

Evidence of wasted and misdirected aid in Iraq is abundant; much of this is detailed in *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, in *Learning from Iraq*, and also in many of the audits carried out by the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) and USAID.⁶³ Of 214 Army, Marine, and PRT officials surveyed for a SIGIR assessment of the Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP), 75 respondents believed that between 10-25 percent of project money was typically lost to fraud and corruption, and 20 believed that

⁶¹ Moyar, 2011, pp. 6-7.

⁶² Moyar, 2011, p. 7.

⁶³ See: Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 2009, and Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, *Learning From Iraq*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 2013. The Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) offers a considerable number of specific program audit reports on its website, many of which detail waste, fraud, and abuse. See SIGIR, <http://www.sigir.mil/directorates/inspections/paReports.html>.

between 25-50 percent was lost.⁶⁴ Some of those surveyed noted that a lack of expertise and leadership undermined their efforts, supporting Moyer's contention that leadership is critical to COIN success. One USAID officer wrote "Maybe if we had more experienced people IN CHARGE [emphasis original] instead of people who had never really worked outside of the US or the Embassy we could have done a much better job."⁶⁵ And, echoing Wolf's concerns, one Army commander who operated in Iraq believed that most of the money he spent went to support the insurgents while generating misleading data for assessment:

We had substantial evidence that the local authorities (Gov't / Security and Military Forces) were stealing right off the top. Additionally, Governors were leveraging position and percentage of CERP payments to pay insurgents to NOT attack certain CERP funded programs. This produced clear benefits for that level of government, security forces, insurgents and contracted party. We lost hundreds of millions of dollars for a false sense of improvement and success.⁶⁶

Yet while Moyer strikes a chord with his critique of aid spending in Iraq, his description of aid policy and elite influence does not agree with much of the recorded history of the conflict. Both military and civilian leaders were cutting deals with Iraqi elite before the war shifted into Phase IV in 2003, and continued to attempt to build quid pro quo deals until the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom.⁶⁷ Many of the officials surveyed for the CERP assessment described the CERP fund as a tool of influence throughout the war, and many of those identified elites as their targets of influence. The coalition history in Anbar Province from 2003 through 2007 provides some insight into the ways in which using aid to influence elites in hold and build can both succeed and fail.

Influencing the elite with aid: The Anbar case

Many reports describe the Anbar Awakening as the result of a new, untried effort to engage elites.⁶⁸ This narrative contends that prior to 2006, the tribal leaders had been left out of the

⁶⁴ Findings and data for this report, and the report itself, can be found at the SIGIR website. As of 07 January, 2012: <http://www.sigir.mil/publications/specialreports.html>

⁶⁵ Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, SIGIR Survey of USG Civilians (USAID), 23 July, 2012, p. 6.

⁶⁶ Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, SIGIR Survey of Former Army Battalion Commanders, 23 July, 2012, p. 15.

⁶⁷ This period runs from 2003 through approximately September 2010, when OIF ended and Operation New Dawn began. At this point, the U.S. mission had transitioned primarily to one of advising and assisting rather than shaping or influencing.

⁶⁸ The Awakening refers to the rebellion by Iraqis against Al Qaida in Iraq in Anbar from 2006 through 2007.

engagement and the aid process.⁶⁹ According to John A. McCary, before the Awakening coalition aid projects were only awarded based on lowest bid contracts or through the Government of Iraq (GOI). Here McCary describes the perceived shift from a period of disengagement to one of engagement:

[In mid-2006] U.S. military leaders began a drastically different approach by actively courting Sunni tribal sheikhs in al Anbar. The U.S. military almost completely changed its reconstruction and security policy in the province, sending money through Sunni tribal sheikhs instead of contract bids or the central government.⁷⁰

While contracting regulations may have restricted the allocation of some aid between late 2004 and early 2006, they did not stop military or civilian officials from using aid as a tool to influence elites well prior to the Awakening. Both Army Special Forces and Marine Corps units incorporated elite engagement into their planning prior to entering Anbar in 2003 and early 2004, respectively.⁷¹ In 2003 the 82d Airborne Division staff funneled aid to and through Iraqi tribal leaders, asking their input to identify eligible contractors. Each day, the Chief of Staff of the division and leaders from subordinate elements would meet with a different Iraqi tribal leader in order to build rapport and to discuss projects and ways to reduce or prevent violence. Both the Army officers and the tribal leaders knew that by soliciting input, the 82d was paying homage to the purported elite of Anbar and currying their favor. In return for the tribal leaders' input – they would of course recommend contractors who belonged to their tribes – the tribal leaders were expected to keep their supporters in check. By the time the 82d had turned over Anbar to the First Marine Division in early 2004, they had spent approximately 28 million dollars on aid projects designed to create jobs for military aged males and to improve the Anbari way of life.⁷² Yet violence increased and continued to increase as the 82d transitioned Anbar to Marine command.

From 2004 through mid-2006, the Marines and Army units in Anbar carried on the policy of engaging with tribal elders, directly and aggressively leveraging aid to influence elites across the

⁶⁹ See: Neil Smith and Sean MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point," *Military Review*, March-April 2008, pp. 41-52.

⁷⁰ McCary, John A., "The Anbar Awakening: An Alliance of Incentives," *The Washington Quarterly*, January 2009, pp. 43-59, p. 45.

⁷¹ E.g. see Thomas R. Searle, "Tribal Engagement in Anbar Province: The Critical Role of Special Operations Forces," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, issue 50, 3d quarter 2008, pp. 62-66, p. 62. Major General Mattis outlined his objectives and directed tactics for operations in Anbar in a 2003 Security and Stabilization Operations conference. The output from this conference identified tribal engagement – elite engagement – as a critical element of the plan.

⁷² Swannack, Charles H., *82nd Airborne Division Commanding General's Briefing from Iraq*, U.S. Department of Defense, 10 March, 2004; and direct observation by the author, and discussions with staff officers of the 82d ABD, February and March, 2003, Anbar, Iraq. Also see the 2004-2006 period interviews in: McWilliams, Timothy S., and Kurtis P. Wheeler, eds., *Al-Anbar Awakens, Volume I*, Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2009.

province.⁷³ In the provincial capital, Ramadi, Marine Colonel Michael W. Manske established a quid pro quo relationship with the head of the Sunni Endowment.⁷⁴ In exchange for a CERP stipend that would pay for mosque repair, cleanup, and security, the Imam promised to ensure that sermons would not include incitement to violence against the coalition. Manske and his staff also used CERP to create an advisory board of Iraqi “graybeards,” or former Ba’athist general officers, all of who were most likely supporting the insurgency.⁷⁵ The Marines provided a stipend to each officer in exchange for their shared wisdom on major issues facing the province; the unspoken but implicit assumption was that the stipend was provided in exchange for their cooperation. Then-Major General James N. Mattis, the division’s commander, authorized an attached Army Special Forces unit to provide CERP funds to the Albu Nimr tribal leaders who, in return, were providing recruits for the security forces and information against local insurgents.⁷⁶ And in a more ruthless use of aid as a “weapon system,” in 2005 a senior U.S. military leader in Anbar had his staff map out tribal boundaries and overlay these with acts of violence.⁷⁷ Increases in violence would result in a decrease in aid to that tribe, creating an unequivocal quid pro quo with the tribal leaders.⁷⁸ Nearly every aid decision in the province involved the local elite, either individually, through councils, or in cooperation with government interlocutors. When coalition officers were prohibited from providing aid directly to tribal leaders, they helped those tribal leaders obtain aid from local government leaders, nearly all of who were Sunni and belonged to a tribe that would have some relation with Anbari tribal elders.⁷⁹

But both the Army and Marine units operating in Anbar from 2003 through mid-2006 discovered that elite engagement only works when the elites have genuine coercive authority. Finding the “right” sheikh is an exercise in futility when none of the sheikhs can mobilize the population. Moyar, McCary, Smith and MacFarland, and others describe tribal elders as all-powerful icons who can turn an insurgency on or off like a faucet if provided with some security and aid support; tribal leaders were happy to convey and reinforce this notion at every opportunity from the first day of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In practice, most of those claiming

⁷³ See McWilliams and Wheeler, 2009, and also Marc Lynch, “Explaining the Awakening: Engagement, Publicity, and the Transformation of the Iraqi Sunni Political Attitudes,” *Security Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2011, pp. 36-72.

⁷⁴ Manske was the leader of the non-doctrinal G-X staff section within the First Marine Division. G-X combined both civil affairs and information operations. I participated in these negotiations and in the project in 2004.

⁷⁵ I also participated in the establishment and execution of the graybeard board in 2004 with Col Manske.

⁷⁶ Mattis, James N., interview remarks in McWilliams, Timothy S., and Kurtis P. Wheeler, eds., *Al-Anbar Awakens, Volume I*, Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2009, pp. 30 and 32. Also see Searle, 2008, p. 62.

⁷⁷ “Weapon system” refers to the *Money As A Weapon System* (MAAWS) approach to aid distribution in COIN. See: Center for Army Lessons Learned, *Commander’s Guide to Money as a Weapons System: Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, handbook, 2009.

⁷⁸ Direct observation by the author, 2005, Anbar, Iraq.

⁷⁹ Direct observation by the author, 2004, Anbar, Iraq.

elite status or identified as elites from 2003 through mid-2006 had very little coercive authority because the population was not willing to be coerced. Former Coalition Provision Authority officer Keith Mines, who was the senior civilian in Anbar in 2003, was one of the primary engagement officers in the province.⁸⁰

We worked with the sheikhs from the arrival of the first unit to Anbar, and never lost contact. There is this odd view that later units and civilian officers somehow “discovered” the sheikhs and tribal leaders after they had been ignored by earlier entities. This is simply not true. They were always in the mix. The issue though, was who were the real sheikhs and which ones were in a position to help stabilize and govern? ...It was very complicated and tricky business, and was a power shift that was destined to take time.

Many of the tribal leaders engaging with the 82d Airborne Division in 2003 fled to Jordan; their quid pro quo relationship evaporated. If it ever had relevance, the graybeard board became irrelevant as AQI quickly surpassed the Ba’athist generals in power and influence; the endowment scheme failed when the Imam was shot in the head; the Abu Nimr working with the coalition were overrun by AQI; and the senior officers who wanted to punish tribes for violence realized that the tribes could not prevent violence in the areas they had claimed to be under their control; quid pro quo punishment in this case would have been counterproductive. Sattar Abu Risha, the man who led the Anbar Awakening in 2006, was a mid-level smuggler living under the shadow of his father and was considered by all to be a bit player in 2003, 2004, 2005, and even through the first half of 2006.⁸¹ Army, Marine, and civilian officials engaged Iraqi tribal, religious, and government elites every day, throughout Anbar Province, for three years. Almost as a matter of course, these U.S. officials leveraged aid as an incentive for support. But that support was not forthcoming at the provincial level until 2006 because the men they were dealing with – the elite of Anbar – had no de facto power to coerce the population to actively support the coalition until the population shifted its perception of AQI.

Understanding why the elites had limited coercive authority until 2006 helps to show why an elite-only aid distribution scheme would not have worked in Anbar. Some argue that in Anbar the elite were irrelevant until a critical mass of average Iraqis decided to shift their allegiance against AQI, while others argue that the opportunity always existed to achieve victory through quid pro quo arrangements. Elite theorists like Moyar believe that the elite can shift the entire

⁸⁰ Mines, Keith, “How Anbar Province Showed Promise and Problems From 2003-2004, Interview With Keith Mines, Former Coalition Provisional Authority Governor,” interview, weblog, www.musingsoniraq.blogspot.com, 19 November 2012. Mines’ comments on the application of aid money to create jobs in COIN are interesting and directly relevant to this discussion.

⁸¹ The murder of Bzi’a Fteikhan Abu Risha, Sattar’s father, and two of his brothers prompted him to engage with the coalition. One reason Sattar was able to exert influence as the population shifted against AQI was that he had been removed from the often degrading tit-for-tat tribal infighting that had taken place prior to 2006. See Mines, 2012, for comments on Sattar Abu Risha’s status early in the war.

course of a campaign like that in Iraq or Afghanistan regardless of efforts to address root causes; the population are equated with sheep. We did not succeed in Iraq until we engaged the right elites with the right kind of leverage. However, Ambassador Mitchell B. Reiss takes a more balanced approach in his evaluation of the Awakening movement.⁸² While the coalition was able to successfully leverage CERP and other funds in 2006 and 2007 to support the Awakening leadership, thereby giving them financial leverage over their potential followers, this same type of effort would not have succeeded earlier in the conflict. The people had to reach a culminating point with AQI, and they had to shift their perception of the coalition. Marc Lynch believes that funding the elite earlier in the campaign would have been (and was) ineffective:

Cash was only effective as part of a wider strategy of engagement, as a positive incentive, but also to build up the prestige and influence of supportive leaders and to undermine more recalcitrant ones...But in the past, such money may well have been refused as not worth the political trouble, the nationalist shame, or the personal insecurity which came with it. Changes in the social environment – shaped by engagement and by the media – profoundly affected these calculations, making the financial incentives consistent with the new social environment rather than something shameful to be hidden from public view.⁸³

Both Reiss and Lynch see aid as playing a relatively minor role in addressing root cause issues and effecting lasting change. Aid certainly played a contributing role to the minor successes achieved during the pre-Awakening period and during the Awakening, but determining the relative value of aid compared to other factors – the troop surge, AQI violence, growing sectarian fears, changes in local perception, time, etc. – is and will remain an exercise in subjective interpretation. I argue that a shift in grass roots support in 2006 empowered the tribal leaders, who were in turn empowered by the coalition. Success in the Awakening relied on both addressing root causes (or providing the environment to allow positive change to occur) and *also* on supporting newly empowered elites. The debate over how and why popular perception shifted against AQI in Anbar will probably remain unresolved. However, it seems clear that no single theory, including elite or leader-centric theory, can explain success or failure in Iraq, and no single theory captures the role that aid might play in replicating an Awakening-style success elsewhere.

⁸² See Mitchell B. Reiss, *Negotiating With Evil: When to Talk to Terrorists*, New York, NY: Open Road, 2010, pp. 210-220. For alternate interpretations, see Stephen Biddle, Jeffrey A. Friedman, and Jacob N. Shapiro, “Giving the Surge Partial Credit for Iraq’s 2007 Reduction in Violence,” *International Security*, Harvard Kennedy School, September, 2012. As of 07 January, 2013: <http://belfercenter.hks.harvard.edu/files/biddle-et-al-policy-brief.pdf>; McWilliams and Wheeler, 2009; McCary, 2009; and Smith and MacFarland, 2009.

⁸³ Lynch, 2011, p. 47. I find that Lynch overplays the role of engagement and media and underplays the coercive power of AQI’s murder and intimidation campaign against the population through mid-2006.

5. Considering Alternatives to Current Practice

Wolf, Fishstein and Wilder, Moyar, and even USAID agree that aid alone is insufficient to stabilize even isolated, local areas in COIN. While Sansom sees value in helping all boats to rise through the uncontrolled application of aid, most observers of COIN believe that aid should be carefully targeted as part of an overarching stabilization plan. Most issues related to aid and root causes in COIN, however, are contentious, and efforts to address problems with aid application tend to stem from unitary theories or relate only to the kind of industrial-strength insurgencies addressed in doctrine. But even a cursory review of available case studies shows that COIN campaigns tend to be very dissimilar from one another. While the U.S. conducted major operations against large-scale insurgencies in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, it has also supported what have been unfairly termed “low-intensity” campaigns in Central and Latin America, in Africa, and elsewhere.

If one accepts that COIN cases are in many ways idiosyncratic, and that stability issues tend to be localized, then neither unitary theories of aid application nor bespoke tools like DSF are generally applicable across all cases. Hold and build are notional constructs that are relevant only to counterinsurgents conducting population-centric clear-hold-build against a large, active insurgency. Root causes matter in clear-hold-build because U.S. doctrine is predicated on population-centric theory; doctrine offers no other options. But not all counterinsurgents care about addressing root causes. Some governments may not seek to build grass roots support for the state. Instead, countries supported by U.S. advisors may be satisfied in suppressing insurgents and repressing the population to achieve *order* rather than stability. Neither Wolf’s systems approach nor Moyar’s leader-centric approach fit within contemporary U.S. doctrine because neither attempts to address root causes. However, the systems approach to aid distribution was relevant in Malaya, and Moyar’s leader-centric theory might translate into a distinct COIN approach that would be effective in a prospective case with more limited objectives. Cutting aid distribution deals with semi-corrupt elite can work if the ultimate COIN objective is repressive order and not a stable, supportive population. The El Salvador case shows the inapplicability of the one size fits all approach to applying large-scale aid in COIN, and Colombia perhaps reinforces the idea that aid and other hold and build type support can be useful if applied in local context.

While the U.S. eventually helped guide a generally acceptable end to the conflict in El Salvador in the early 1990s, Benjamin C. Schwarz presents a strong case that the U.S. efforts to reform the Salvadoran government and armed forces in order to create a democratic ally were misguided.⁸⁴ Objectives of building a U.S.-styled democracy in El Salvador amounted to listing

⁸⁴ There is coincidence between the fall of the Soviet Union and the defeat of the FMLN, a Soviet proxy group.

“merely unattainable desiderata.”⁸⁵ The U.S. funded the Salvadorans to reform and to redistribute land in order to appease the population while the right-wing government fought to defend the elitist and corrupt status quo. The elite had little incentive to address root causes with U.S. aid because doing so would have necessitated a clean sweep of the upper reaches of government and civil society. Schwarz argues that American policymakers were blind to the inapplicability of population-centric COIN to El Salvador:

Failure is ascribed to inadequate integration among the military advisory group, CIA, AID, and the embassy; or inapplicable and inadequate training of American personnel; or unpredictable funding of security assistance... The solutions prescribed are invariably programmatic, while the premises upon which counterinsurgency doctrine are based remain inviolate... If the counterinsurgency practices and program proposed by low-intensity conflict doctrine [now IW or COIN doctrine] are unable to build a democratic society and so defeat insurgency, two alternatives present themselves. Both, for obvious reasons, are unacceptable to the United States: one is unmitigated repression, the method the Salvadoran far right will not hesitate to employ if American aid – and constraints – are withdrawn; the other is American colonialism.⁸⁶

Schwarz underplays the influence the U.S. was able to exert over the elites in El Salvador through aid and political pressure, and also the degree to which the Salvadoran military improved over time. Paul P. Cale, a former U.S. military advisor to El Salvador, describes several notable successes there, and contends that at least the military advisory mission helped to reduce violence and to sustain a vital partner.⁸⁷ Cale argues that the light footprint approach was the right one to take, and that it forced the Salvadorans to come to terms with their own problems. Another advisor, Victor M. Rosello, echoes this belief:

If any single piece of advice can be extracted from the Salvadoran insurgency, it is this: Direct US combat intervention in foreign civil wars should always be the last option exercised. As demonstrated in El Salvador, there are other novel uses of military assistance which may take longer but may benefit all parties in the long run, and may far outweigh the risks incurred from direct US combat intervention.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Schwarz, Benjamin C., *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador: The Frustrations of Reform and the Illusions of Nation Building*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1991, p. 10.

⁸⁶ Schwarz, 1991, pp. x-xi. In Schwarz' view, population-centric COIN is not universally applicable. His alternatives are sardonic; obviously neither repression nor colonialism is an option available to American policymakers conducting open counterinsurgency warfare. But Schwarz raises two critical questions: 1) how do you conduct population-centric COIN in an environment that is not conducive to population-centric COIN; and 2) what other politically acceptable approach might work in a place like El Salvador?

⁸⁷ Cale, 1986. President Reagan identified El Salvador as a vital partner on several occasions.

⁸⁸ Rosello, Victor M., “Lessons From El Salvador,” *Parameters*, Winter 1993-1994, pp. 100-108, p. 103.

Since the end of the conflict, Salvadoran political and social culture has changed significantly. That a former FMLN commander could be elected president in a valid, democratic electoral process would have been unimaginable to most observers in the early 1990s. U.S. involvement in El Salvador during and after the war probably contributed to this change. But Schwarz's argument regarding the inability to induce strategically-relevant change in the Salvadoran political and social fabric through the use of aid *over the course of the war* – change that might have led to a more clear cut victory – is relevant in either a light footprint or large scale operation. It is worth considering whether a modified version of Moyer's approach would have been more appropriate in El Salvador. The elite were certainly willing to take and apply U.S. aid; the U.S. invested billions of dollars in military, intelligence, and aid activities there. At the very least, aid to the military kept the FMLN at bay and kept a U.S. proxy afloat. If the U.S. had focused all its investment towards elite influence rather than focusing part on reforms, it could probably have built a more effective military partner. However, this partner would also have been even more ruthless than it was reported to be during the 1980s. Moyer's contention that the U.S. can win by cutting deals with mafia-like elites is eminently practical but politically unpalatable in the modern era. Schwarz's rather sardonic alternative options for El Salvador constitute a warning to those considering either Wolf's or Moyer's alternatives to clear-hold-build: practicality does not necessarily translate into attainable, publicly-acceptable U.S. policy.

The U.S. has had more clear success in Colombia. Although total victory in Colombia is not yet assured, most observers agree that the FARC has been all but decimated and that the Colombian government has achieved sufficient power and legitimacy to sustain long-term stability in the most critical parts of the country. Under President Alvaro Uribe, Colombia has implemented its own modified version of clear-hold-build, using American military aid to strengthen its armed forces and police and also to reinforce its service delivery in cleared areas. USAID has played a key role in supporting the Colombian government's efforts to build popular support and to wean locals off of the FARC's narcotics-funded largesse. Instead of executing a large footprint operation in Colombia, the U.S. took what might be described as a "medium footprint" approach to support the Government of Colombia (GoC). The military presence is restricted mostly to special operations advisors, drug enforcement agents, communicators, diplomats, aid workers, and intelligence experts who provide support to the Colombian armed forces. David Spencer, et al., found that the Colombians are primarily responsible for their own success, and that U.S. military and civil aid plays only a reinforcing role.⁸⁹ The U.S. role in Colombia has been *intentionally* low key. The USAID program is purposefully designed to put a Colombian face on all projects. An external evaluation of the USAID program in Colombia

⁸⁹ Spencer, David E., et al., *Colombia's Road to Recovery: Security and Governance 1982-2010*, National Defense University, 17 June, 2011, p. ix.

found this approach to be critical to the success of the GoC, and also to be generalizable in similar circumstances:

The relative anonymity of the OTI [Office of Transition Initiatives] programs made it possible for the GoC to be seen as a credible provider of services. This approach – what might be called “strategic non-communication” – should be adopted for any program in which one of the main purposes is to develop the capacity and credibility of the Colombian state *as a state*. Priority should continue to be given to this approach as the project moves into its next phase.⁹⁰

It is not at all clear that this would have worked prior to the implementation of Plan Colombia, under a less competent Colombian government, or in any other situation. However, the success of a medium footprint, low key, and oblique approach to applying aid during hold and build in Colombia provides an alternative to the kind of massed, U.S. driven hold and build operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁹¹ There are certainly parallels worth examining between Colombia and Philippines, where the U.S. has also taken a medium footprint approach to COIN.⁹² It is also worth noting that in Colombia, USAID shifted from applying aid in areas of relative instability to areas that were generally considered stable in order to draw insurgent supporters away from FARC-controlled territory.⁹³ They have achieved some success with this alternative to the kind of hold and build tactics used in Iraq and Afghanistan; this is the approach that Fishstein and Wilder recommended for Afghanistan. Offsetting aid might not work in Afghanistan but it is certainly an option that should be made known to decisionmakers and planners for prospective cases.

⁹⁰ Caroline Hartzell, et al., *USAID/OTI's Integrated Governance Response Program in Colombia: A Final Evaluation*, U.S. Agency for International Development, April 2011, p. ii.

⁹¹ Also see Thomas A. Marks, “A Model Counterinsurgency: Uribe’s Colombia (2002-2006) vs FARC,” *Military Review*, March-April 2007.

⁹² For example, see Gregory Wilson, “Anatomy of a Successful COIN Operation: OEF-Philippines and the Indirect Approach,” *Military Review*, November-December 2006; and Michael J. Yates, *USAID/Philippines Strategy 2005-2009*, U.S. Agency for International Development, 14 March, 2005.

⁹³ Spencer, et al., 2011, pp. 90-91.

6. Observations, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Wolf, Fisthein and Wilder, and Moyar propose alternatives to current practice, and available case studies shed light on the viability of their recommendations. Yet these three articles and the associated case study analyses also open the door to broader insights. The following observations and recommendations are derived from the literature reviewed for this report, from interviews for previous and ongoing RAND projects, and from my analysis of a range of COIN cases including and beyond those described here.⁹⁴ First, there seems to be general agreement on one key issue related to aid in COIN:

Aid has value in COIN, but spending should be tightly controlled – More money is not better in COIN. Limiting aid expenditures can improve the impact of money spent, it can prevent unregulated inflation and corruption, it can reduce the kind of dependency that undermines transition, and it can also limit the amount of money and goods that is leaked to the insurgents. Money should be available to counterinsurgents, but profligate spending should not be rewarded or viewed as a sign of progress.

Observations and recommendations

Root causes matter for clear-hold-build, but identifying them is a subjective challenge – Population-centric COIN demands that counterinsurgents address root causes. However, root causes are intangible and often dynamic. Senior leaders must allow local commanders to apply judgment in identifying and addressing root causes. Sometimes local commanders will be wrong, but there is no way to guarantee any process of identifying root causes will be accurate. In a very few cases, a grand root cause issue might be identified and addressed at the national level through reconciliation; Iraq and Afghanistan do not represent all prospective COIN cases.

Accept that it is not possible to identify causal impact of aid – While identifying and preventing waste, fraud, and abuse should be part of the aid process, some projects that appear to be failures have had positive impacts, and some projects that appear to be successful are in fact counterproductive. There is no way to assign real operational or strategic value to most projects

⁹⁴ See Ben Connable, *How Insurgencies End*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010. There are a whole host of lessons learned reports that contain detailed recommendations on how to improve aid spending in COIN. Both SIGIR and SIGAR have written extensively on the subject, and various other research groups have published detailed or at least well-informed reports on broader aid issues and specifically on CERP. For example, see: Patterson, Rebecca, and Jonathan Robinson, “The Commander as Investor: Changing CERP Practices,” *PRISM*, vol. 2, no. 2, March, 2011, pp. 115-126; and Johnson, Gregory, Vijaya Ramachandaran, and Julie Walz, “CERP in Afghanistan: Refining Military Capabilities in Development Activities,” *PRISM*, vol 3., no. 3., June 2012, pp. 81-98.

or money spent, and in most cases output or environmental indicators cannot be directly linked to aid investments. The inability to identify causal impact has clear implications for any metrics-driven aid assessment process; in most cases it will not be possible to show clear value for money spent in large-scale COIN or even in many smaller operations. This does not mean the money is wasted, though. In many cases aid has significant incidental benefit that may not be directly linked to its stated purpose.

Clear-hold-build is the only option in U.S. COIN doctrine, but there are others – Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, envisions only one type and scale of insurgency, and offers only one path to defeat that insurgency. This is woefully insufficient to address the wide array of possible situations that may arise in the coming decades, and it does not even encompass all ongoing cases. Decisionmakers should have multiple strategic and operational approaches to pick from in order to address each unique situation, taking into account their ultimate objectives, available resources and time, and their preference to conduct overt or less than overt operations.⁹⁵

Unitary theories of aid application in COIN are options, not grand theories – There is more than one way to execute COIN, and there is more than one way to think about the application of aid in COIN. Wolf, Fishstein and Wilder, and Moyar all present interesting alternative options. Specifically, Wolf and Moyar offer alternative operational paradigms for applying aid in COIN. Just as the methods they critique might not be universally applicable, neither are their alternative approaches. A genuine ends, ways, and means approach to strategy demands multiple theories of aid delivery be incorporated into doctrine and presented as alternatives.

Operational theories based on cold calculation are tempting but not politically viable – Today, the U.S. probably could not – and should not – replicate the kind of forced population relocation and commodity controls applied by the British in Malaya. While civilians unfortunately suffer in every war, and some controls can still be applied in COIN, a strict interpretation of the systems approach is not palatable to either the U.S. public or to many prospective U.S. allies.⁹⁶ And while the U.S. necessarily, quietly cuts deals with unsavory elites in many circumstances, doing so overtly and on a broad scale – and in the absence of efforts to improve the lot of the population – is not in keeping with publicly promoted U.S. national

⁹⁵ For example, the U.S. could take unilateral action if the government is an unacceptable partner; the U.S. could seek to only destroy the insurgents and not to build legitimacy; the U.S. might find it more valuable to coopt the insurgency and overthrow the government if the root causes of the insurgency are widespread and the insurgents' agenda is in harmony with U.S. national security policy.

⁹⁶ FM 3-24 offers the example of Tal Afar as a model of success in COIN. This operation required the U.S. counterinsurgents to seal off the city and tightly control the movement of the population. This approach was replicated elsewhere in Iraq, and it proved successful in some cases. However, controlling movement and access probably represents the realistic limit of the systems approach for U.S. military commanders in COIN.

security policy.⁹⁷ Cutting deals is also more likely to produce short-term security than the kind of lasting stability typically sought by policymakers. Elements of systems or elite theories are appropriate in certain circumstances, but should not be adopted wholesale as doctrine or policy.

Conclusion

While some aid spending has had clear benefit to both counterinsurgents and to local populations, there is little empirical evidence from Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan that the U.S. has succeeded in applying development aid either to address root causes or to further U.S. strategic objectives in large scale COIN. Because direct military intervention tends to take place under the most violent circumstances and in countries with particularly weak infrastructure and legitimacy, in these cases it is very difficult to apply aid obliquely through government partners. T.E. Lawrence's oft-cited axiom to let the supported officials take the lead has backfired repeatedly in Iraq and Afghanistan because partners often had little to no real authority, were utterly corrupt, or were simply incapable of useful action.⁹⁸ Aid applied to buffer an incapable or unsuitable partner is likely to be aid wasted. And as Vietnam, Iraq, and (apparently) Afghanistan show, once an external sponsor has committed to a full-scale COIN campaign and deployed a large military force, it cannot then revert to a smaller footprint until some real stability has been achieved, at least not without courting failure.

The Anbar case showed that even in large-scale COIN, aid can play a role in effecting strategic change if the counterinsurgent has patience and is able to wait for a shift in grass roots outlooks. Sometimes that moment never comes, and the counterinsurgent is trapped into pouring money and material into a bottomless pit. Because large scale COIN is necessarily an expensive and high profile operation, failure to show meaningful progress in hold and build is likely to erode national political will more quickly than in medium or small footprint operations. A smaller footprint does not guarantee success, but it does give policymakers greater flexibility. Because smaller operations tend to be conducted out of the public eye, there is less pressure on senior commanders to constantly show progress and return for investment on aid money. In turn, tactical commanders and civilian officials have greater leeway to operate within local context.

⁹⁷ Moyer also recommends putting competent and responsible leaders in place. However, this is difficult when those leaders might not be available or when the U.S. lacks direct control over the host nation government. Also, by hand picking leaders and manipulating the system, the U.S. may undermine its own legitimacy and, potentially, the legitimacy of the leaders it supports. The benefit of good leadership is clear. Unfortunately, hand-jamming good leadership into place is unrealistic in many cases.

⁹⁸ It should be noted that Lawrence was an advisor to insurgents, not counterinsurgents. The actual quote from the *Twenty-Seven Articles* is: "Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them. Actually, also, under the very odd conditions of Arabia, your practical work will not be as good as, perhaps, you think it is." Lawrence, T.E., "Twenty-Seven Articles," *Arab Bulletin*, 20 August, 1917. As of 10 January, 2013: http://www.telstudies.org/writings/works/articles_essays/1917_twenty-seven_articles.shtml

Colombia and perhaps the Philippines show that hold and build works best when a functional host nation is in the lead, while El Salvador and perhaps Afghanistan show that even the most effective U.S. or coalition operation requires good timing and a suitable local partner.

It is unlikely that the U.S. will purposefully engage in a large-scale COIN operation for the foreseeable future. Near-term resource constraints all but preclude the execution of another war on the scale of Iraq or Afghanistan. There is now opportunity to learn from mistakes made in the post-9/11 era and to hone the techniques developed in smaller, indirect counterinsurgency actions. While a smaller footprint operation may not be sufficient to fill the vacuum in a large failed-state scenario like Afghanistan in 2002 or Iraq in 2003, a smaller footprint and an indirect approach are appropriate in places like post-2000 Colombia and the Philippines. A smaller footprint and indirect approach will require fewer aid resources, and will allow both military and civilian officials to target aid money more effectively. Careful selection of partners and conscientious timing of intervention will help ensure success of these smaller-scale COIN operations. A reduction in required resources – both military and aid resources – will help sustain political support for what are often ten-year COIN campaigns.

The kinds of small and medium footprint operations that might *not* employ doctrinal, U.S.-driven clear-hold-build tactics seem to be more efficient, more politically palatable, and ultimately more effective than large scale COIN. However, policymakers sometimes do not have the luxury of choosing their wars. Senior policymakers did not anticipate fighting a long-term counterinsurgency war in Vietnam, Afghanistan, or Iraq. Therefore, while large scale COIN may be unpalatable and unaffordable, it might not be avoidable. If the U.S. finds itself once again engaged in large scale, large footprint COIN attempting to create or legitimize a fledgling government, then the long, inefficient, and politically unpalatable doctrine of applying massive amounts of aid as part of hold-build remains the only generally accepted operational paradigm. The theoretical alternatives that do exist are not sufficiently generalizable and seem unsuitable to the contemporary operating environment. This vacuum presents a clear challenge to both the research community and the military.

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