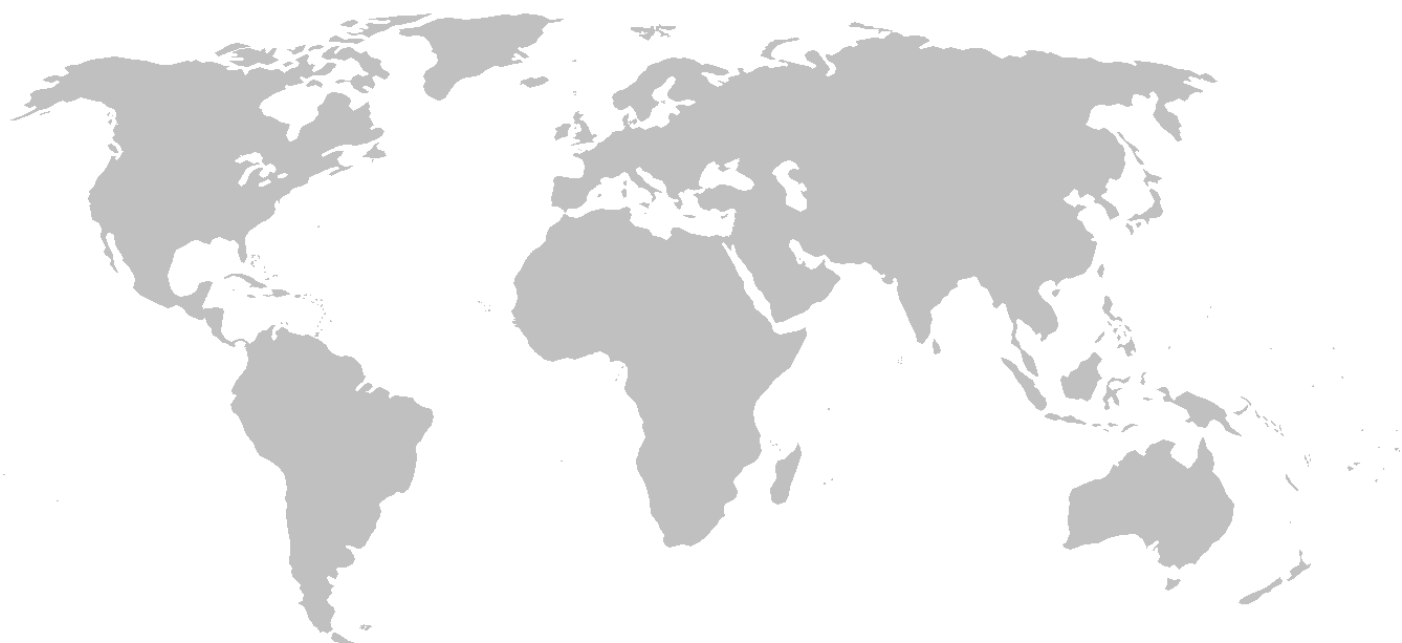




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DEVELOPMENT IN AFGHANISTAN'S  
COUNTERINSURGENCY: A NEW GUIDE



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## Executive Summary



In the areas of Afghanistan beset by insurgency, development spending has done little to increase popular support for the government, casting doubt on the counterinsurgency and development theories that have inspired this spending. Practitioners, however, have lacked access to viable alternative theories or principles on the use of development in COIN. This guide offers a comprehensive alternative approach, derived from the leader-centric model of counterinsurgency and based upon a wide variety of counterinsurgency campaigns in Afghanistan and previous conflicts. According to this approach, the primary purpose of development aid in counterinsurgency should be to improve local security and governance, because development is less important than security and governance and is effective only where security and governance are present. Development aid should be used to co-opt local elites, not to obtain the gratitude of the entire population, and should be made contingent on reciprocal action by those elites. The elites must be selected carefully, as the selection of certain elites will empower malign actors or alienate other elites. The number of organizations involved in development activities should be kept as small as possible, and greater attention should be paid to the selection of leaders for those organizations, as leadership quality has a great impact on project effectiveness. In select districts and provinces, governors should be permitted to use development aid to bolster patronage networks. The current aid streams flowing into Afghanistan far exceed the capacity of leaders and development personnel to handle them, so aid levels should be reduced, and emphasis on quantity of aid spent should be replaced with emphasis on attainment of COIN objectives. In Afghanistan, senior leaders of USAID and other foreign development organizations still prefer long-term development to short-term stabilization, to the detriment of the counterinsurgency. If they cannot be convinced to change their ways, then their participation in Afghanistan may need to be downsized.

## Background



This past spring, experts from around the world travelled to Wilton Park, a sixteenth-century manor at the foot of Sussex Downs, for a seminal conference on the role of development in counterinsurgency. The list of speakers was heavy on individuals with long experience in Afghanistan, whether as government officials or researchers, and included some of the world's foremost development and counterinsurgency experts. At the end of the event, the conference organizers issued a report listing consensus conclusions, of which the most significant was the following: "There is an urgent need to ensure that the new 'population centric' COIN strategy is evidence-based, and does not continue to uncritically assume that development aid 'wins hearts and minds' and/or promotes stability." The report expressed skepticism about other entrenched assumptions concerning aid, such as the notion that "key drivers of insecurity are unemployment, poverty, and radical Islam," and it asserted that most Afghans hold negative opinions of foreign aid.<sup>1</sup> This author's research during three trips to Afghanistan in 2010 corroborated all of these assertions.



The assumptions referenced in the report emanate from two major strands of thinking on development aid in counterinsurgency. The first strand, the U.S. military's "population-centric" COIN doctrine, views economic, social, and political grievances as principal causes of popular support for insurgents, and emphasizes the need to satisfy these grievances through actions in the three major counterinsurgency "lines of operation"—security, governance, and development.<sup>2</sup> In terms of development, population-centric COIN theorists advocate spending aid on both short-term and long-term projects. They also recommend trading development aid to the indigenous population for political support, in the interests of short-term improvements in security and governance, or what in the field is generally termed "stabilization," but do not believe that development must be made conditional on reciprocation from the population. The population-centric prescriptions on development gained support from analyses of the Iraq War that attributed the population's turn against the insurgency in 2006 and 2007 to the use of development aid to buy popular support.<sup>3</sup> Additional backing has come more recently from statistical analyses purporting to show a strong correlation between development spending and security.

The second strand of thinking, which predominates among international development practitioners and academics, shares the view that grievances drive insurgency, but puts more emphasis on economic and social grievances than political ones. It favors long-term social and economic development as the principal antidotes to grievances, and attaches less importance than population-centric COIN to the security and governance lines of operation, relegating them to the status of facilitators of development.<sup>4</sup> Conditioning aid upon political behavior by the recipients for short-term military and political gain is considered unnecessary, because development projects will reduce the hostility of the population and ultimately eliminate the grievances that cause insurgency. It is also considered repugnant, for it transforms the donors from philanthropists into political supporters of a host-nation government that is far from perfect.

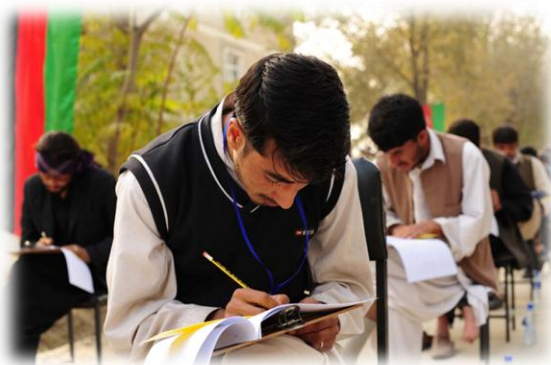
As the Wilton Park report noted, both population-centric COIN and the prevailing development theory are coming under fire because of a growing realization that billions of foreign dollars allocated to jobs, roads, and schoolhouses have done little to increase the population's willingness to support the Afghan government or resist the Taliban. The central question begging to be answered, upon which billions of additional dollars are riding, is whether the theory that development spending necessarily increases popular support is in need of revision around the edges, or of complete replacement. The Wilton Park report did not take a clear position on the question; some sections could be said to support the first answer, and others the second.<sup>5</sup> Other analysts have argued unequivocally that the theory is deeply flawed, but they have not produced an alternative that offers useful guidance to COIN practitioners.

This guide takes the position that the existing theory must be discarded because of its fundamental flaws, and offers a comprehensive alternative approach to development aid, which is derived from an altogether different COIN model, the leader-centric model. The effectiveness of this alternative approach has been proven in counterinsurgencies past and present, and some of the U.S. military forces in Afghanistan today are employing it. Other military forces in Afghanistan and the large majority of civilian development personnel there, however, are not using this approach. The guide is intended to persuade these practitioners to change how they use development aid, and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of foreign development aid more broadly.

## Theoretical Problems



Both population-centric COIN and development theory rely on a basic formula that can be summarized as follows: popular grievances cause insurgency, so counterinsurgents should adopt a set of methods that gain the support of "the people" by redressing these grievances.<sup>6</sup> This formula, which shall be called the "grievance formula," has three critical weaknesses, all of which bear directly on the employment of development aid. All three result from a failure to assign adequate importance to leaders, who are the central actors in counterinsurgency.<sup>7</sup> They shall be addressed in order. The first of these weaknesses is that grievances do not cause insurgencies. Insurgencies are caused by determined elites who have the talents required to organize military operations, operate shadow



governance structures, and mobilize the population against the government. Grievances can make their job easier, but are not essential to their success. In a given counterinsurgency, we often find a lack of insurgent activity where the population has numerous grievances, and intensive insurgent activity where it has relatively few grievances. By contrast, we seldom find a lack of insurgent activity where able insurgent elites are present, and we never find intensive insurgent activity where such elites are absent.

The insurgent elites obtain popular support by doing the government's job better than the government is doing it, particularly in the areas of security

and governance. When choosing whether to support to the insurgents or the counterinsurgents, the number one criterion for most people living amidst an insurgency, including most Afghans at the present time, is security. Governance comes second, and development is well back in third place.<sup>8</sup> This ordering differs from that in population-centric COIN, which puts governance first, and development theory, which puts development at the top. Support of the government increases sharply as security improves, somewhat less sharply when governance improves, and very little when development improves. In Afghanistan and numerous other cases, the insurgents have been able to control large amounts of territory with little or no expenditures on development, by outperforming the government in security and governance.<sup>9</sup>

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. "Whoever can bring us security—those are the ones we want," remarked a shop owner in Kandahar recently. "Nothing is more important than our lives." Insurgent violence, the NATO military operations that failed to stop that violence, and thievery in this man's neighborhood caused damage to property and person and discouraged customers from patronizing businesses. Although the Taliban would forbid him from running a photo shop if they were in power, he said he would rather have the Taliban back, because "during the Taliban, there was security. There were no thieves."<sup>10</sup>



The preference of Afghans for good governance over development has been demonstrated by the ability of the insurgents to recruit successfully in areas where development projects have proceeded apace but the district and provincial governors and police chiefs have extorted exorbitant sums from the population, favored one ethnicity or tribe over another in administering justice, raped boys, or pilfered aid funds. Whereas poverty is not readily attributable to an individual, bad governance is easily attributed to poor leaders, and it arouses human outrage more easily than underdevelopment. A tribal elder in Paktia, commenting on the lack of security in the province, remarked that "Paktia has lots of problems, but the issue of lack of clinics, schools, and roads are not the problem. The main problem is we don't have a good government.... There's a growing distance between the people and the government and this is the main cause of the deteriorating security situation."<sup>11</sup> Another observer put it this way: "Schools or clinics are useless if people hate the district level administration."<sup>12</sup>

Although development is the least important of the three lines of operation, we should be careful not to write it off as irrelevant. Throughout the history of counterinsurgency, development aid has increased popular support in some places, had no effect in others, and decreased it in still others. Determining the conditions that account for the variation will enable us to concentrate development aid where conditions are suitable, and to seek appropriate changes to conditions where they are not yet suitable.



## Dependence of development on security and governance



Development spending has usually done much more to strengthen the government and weaken the insurgents in areas where security and good governance are present, in Afghanistan as well as in other counterinsurgencies. In sections of the Afghan countryside where counterinsurgent forces have not established military dominance, insurgents have regularly halted projects through threats or violence against the workers. When projects have been completed in insecure areas, insurgents have often destroyed them, or kept away the staff who are required to operate them.



In other insecure areas, the insurgents allow development to proceed in order to leech off of it. Numerous development contractors in Afghanistan pay protection money to private security companies or local power brokers because the counterinsurgents lack sufficient forces in the area, and oftentimes this money falls into Taliban hands through intimidation or collusion. Military superiority also allows the insurgents to reap the economic benefits of completed projects. For instance, the United States spent more than \$100 million repairing and upgrading the Kajaki

hydropower plant to provide electricity to Helmand and Kandahar provinces, but last year half of its electricity went into areas where the insurgents control the electric grid, enabling the Taliban to issue electric bills to consumers and send out collection agents with medieval instruments of torture to ensure prompt payment. The consumers in these places use the power for the irrigation of fields that grow poppies, which in turn fuel the opium trade from which the Taliban derive much of their funding.

Where good governance is lacking, development money often finds its way into the 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 positions in the Afghan government are sold for tens of thousands of dollars to such individuals, ensuring that the buyers will seek to squeeze large sums from foreign donors and ordinary Afghans in order to recoup their investments. 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.

## Leadership and Development



Success in security and governance, and also in development, depend more than anything else on the quality of the leaders in the local area. The second weakness of the grievance formula lies in its contention that effectiveness in COIN hinges on finding the right methods, and its inattention to finding the right leaders.<sup>13</sup> Most COIN methods, whether in security, governance, or development, do not work in all cases, and most succeed only when implemented by leaders with the proper capabilities. Insurgent and counterinsurgent leaders use their intellects to determine the combination of methods best suited to mobilizing the population, co-opting elites, and capturing or killing implacable enemies in their areas, and then draw on a broad range of leadership attributes to implement those methods. In most counterinsurgencies, the side with the more talented and motivated leaders ultimately prevails.<sup>14</sup>

In the realm of development aid, stacks of excellent instruction manuals and mountains of cash will provide no benefit to a counterinsurgency unless the right leaders are in command. Poor leaders, in fact, are likely to use aid in counterproductive ways, and the more aid they have, the worse it is. Good COIN leaders possessing little development aid are much preferable to bad COIN leaders with much aid, just as a good artist with cheap paint and canvass creates a better painting than a poor artist with the most expensive materials. Of course, it would generally be better for the good COIN leader to possess more aid money than less, just as it would be for the good artist to have better materials. But fixating on the artisan's resources risks losing sight of the artisan and succumbing to the common delusion that allocating enough resources to the task deserves more attention than allocating the right people.

## Determining the Beneficiaries



In dispensing development aid, the first challenge facing the counterinsurgent leader is deciding on the beneficiaries. Herein can be found the third deficiency in the grievance formula, the treatment of "the people" as an undifferentiated mass. As a consequence of the reigning COIN and development theories, the United States routinely has funded and continues to fund numerous projects in Afghanistan that provide the same benefits or job opportunities to everyone in the community.<sup>15</sup> The commanders who have made the best use of development aid in counterinsurgency, however, have figured out that aid benefits the counterinsurgency most when aimed at the elites of a society, and have invested much effort into finding the right elites and seeking to influence them with aid.



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. Co-

option of elites differs in important ways from the “mobilization” by which most of the population can be brought to support the counterinsurgents. Mobilization requires changing people’s allegiances and leading them. Co-option requires only changing allegiances, for elites do not need others to lead them, and can themselves lead and mobilize substantial numbers of people. With co-option, as with mobilization, the security and governance lines of operation are generally more important than the development line in altering an individual’s allegiance, but development spending can have a greater impact in co-option than in mobilization. It can be concentrated on the few individuals capable of leading the rest of the community, and this concentration can ensure that those elites remain above others in power and wealth, which elites usually believe they deserve in such circumstances since they are taking the most risks and doing the most difficult work.

Making the stakes high for the elites also gives counterinsurgents the leverage to insist that the recipients take action against the insurgents, leverage that should be used regularly. Afghans are inveterate bargainers, and they expect that they will have to provide something in return for development aid, or for anything else of value. They view us as weak when we give them something for nothing. As is true of everything in counterinsurgency, there may be exceptions to the rule, instances where it is beneficial to provide aid unconditionally at first because the beneficiaries are too scared to reciprocate, but we would do well to apply the principal of conditionality as a general rule, which is not presently the case in much of Afghanistan.



Channeling aid to elites and demanding their support in return was instrumental to the counterinsurgency triumph in Iraq. During the first few years of the Iraq War, U.S. policymakers forbade this method in the interest of building up a democratic national government and national security forces, a policy that caused large numbers of Iraqi elites to side with the insurgents and did little to bring other elites to the counterinsurgent side. The United States would spend \$25,000 on a school intended for the general benefit of an Iraqi community, but induced no Iraqi men to resist Al Qaeda because it did not empower local leaders or provide incentives for those leaders to mobilize the population against the insurgents. The insurgency eventually became so bad that the prohibition against cutting deals with local

elites was lifted, at which point American commanders quickly co-opted tribal leaders by paying them \$35,000 for a \$25,000 school and letting them dole out construction contracts to their kinsmen. At American insistence, these Iraqi elites returned the favor by providing intelligence information or recruiting men into local security forces. 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.

A development strategy focused on bolstering a society’s elites will ensure that socioeconomic inequality persists, and it will let the society’s elites decide how much wealth should go towards poverty alleviation, which may or may not be as much as we would like. The international community, however, must be disabused of the idea that eradicating inequality and poverty in Afghanistan lies within our reach, as well as the idea that such an outcome is required for the success of the counterinsurgency. We have not been able to eradicate inequality or poverty in our own countries, despite far larger



expenditures, much better governance, and an absence of insurgency. We can, nevertheless, take some comfort in the fact that the average Afghan will be better off economically and socially if our side prevails than if the Taliban returns to power. Ending insurgent violence will allow NGOs and governmental development organizations to operate freely and much more effectively throughout the country. In addition, by influencing which elites gain the most power, we can help weed out the most predatory and corrupt of them, which will do much to facilitate long-term stability and prosperity.

## Selecting Elites



Counterinsurgent leaders often face difficult and momentous decisions on which community elites to co-opt, for not all elites make good partners, and selecting one group may guarantee the hostility of another. The task requires detailed understanding of local political and social dynamics, and sound analysis of the interrelationships between development, security and governance. Historically, Afghanistan's rural population deferred to the authority of aristocrats known as khans, and that of lesser elites with administrative powers, who held such titles as malik or arbab. During the last decades of the twentieth century, however, large segments of the rural elite classes were displaced or destroyed by warfare and the social policies of Afghanistan's Communists and the Taliban. New elites emerged to take their place, men deriving their power from charisma, wealth, or military prowess. Some of them enjoyed the support of strong tribal structures, and some received support based on their ethnicity. As a result of these developments, today's counterinsurgents find that the ability, social background, age, and tribal and ethnic backing of elites varies from province to province, valley to valley, and village to village. The counterinsurgent leader has no steadfast rules by which to find the men of greatest influence, but must instead get to know each village.

Finding the right elites in Afghanistan also requires the ability to discern the conflicts among elites and groups, in order to dispense development aid in such a manner as to avoid inadvertent exacerbation of factional rivalries. One of the most important differences between Afghanistan and many other counterinsurgency environments is the extraordinary fractiousness of Afghanistan's population. Westerners have often underestimated the breadth and depth of Afghanistan's internal divisions, as a result of reading histories of Afghanistan that focus on the assemblage of Afghan warriors to fight foreign invaders and neglect to mention that the intervals of foreign invasion have been but relatively brief interruptions to almost incessant quarrelling among Afghans.

Time and again, the decision to provide assistance to one Afghan leader or group has alienated others by creating perceptions of favoritism towards particular ethnicities, tribes, families, or political factions. Whenever one group receives something that others do not receive, the non-recipients claim that the giver has victimized them, and are indifferent to soothing words suggesting otherwise. Consequently, no development aid in Afghanistan can be apolitical, however much foreign donors would like it so. The Taliban, adept at identifying Afghans who view themselves as have-nots, have recruited a large percentage of their present followers by capitalizing on such perceptions of favoritism.

A community shura may provide a mechanism for reaching compromises that distribute aid in a manner acceptable to all factions. But sometimes it does not. The elites in certain Afghan communities have proven incapable of reaching consensus on which development projects are best. In others, the strongest faction has twisted the arms of the others prior to the shuras in order to give foreigners a false impression of community consensus.<sup>16</sup>

In such instances, counterinsurgent leaders who wish to be effective must devote much time and energy towards balancing the desires and jealousies of the competing factions. If they cannot find a solution that placates all factions, it may be necessary to give more aid to a group that is on the fence than to a group that is thoroughly committed to the insurgency. A strong faction may have to be supported at the expense of another because there is no other way to mobilize a large segment of the population against the insurgents. Elsewhere, the risk of generating harmful envy may be so great that the best solution is to refrain from aid expenditures to anyone.

According to population-centric COIN doctrine, local elections provide an excellent way to determine which members of the community should take on leadership roles and make decisions for the community. Yet when local elections have been held in Afghanistan and a variety of other countries, they have not proven a reliable means of bringing the most gifted and virtuous elites to the fore. Through demagoguery, intimidation, or simply the tyranny of the majority, elections have handed power to insurgents or their sympathizers, or to wicked individuals whose ensuing acts of oppression created favorable conditions for insurgent recruiters. Efforts to exclude suspect elements from elections have stripped longstanding elites of their power and turned them into insurgents, as occurred after the fall of Saddam Hussein and the end of the American Civil War.



In most of the world's insurgencies, the insurgent elites and/or the counterinsurgent elites have been able to mobilize the population without holding popular elections. In most illiterate and semiliterate societies, the large majority of the population cares less about whether they had a say in selecting the government than about how that government is treating them. Even some societies with high rates of literacy and education have shown a decided preference for good government over elected government. If government officials show the people courtesy and demonstrate impartiality in resolving disputes between neighbors, the people will be inclined to support them. If officials beat people without cause and favor their relatives in administering justice, the people will be receptive to the entreaties of insurgents who promise to destroy the government. Elites, for their part, may care how the governments are selected, but are usually amenable to autocracy because it preserves their power and wealth. In general, elections are likely to benefit the counterinsurgents only in places with a lengthy history of elections, for only there can be found deep concern for democracy and knowledge of how to guard against its abuse.

## Project Selection



Counterinsurgency leaders require sound judgment and creativity to select the optimal types of development project in a given locale. In one village, a new paved road may be the best choice because it will allow security forces in the district capital to reach the village much more quickly. In another, a road project would be too vulnerable to insurgent violence, but a school would be an excellent choice because it is the easiest way to get resources to the leaders of a powerful tribe. In a third, irrigation canals may be the most useful project because the workers will be in an excellent position to see insurgents emplacing IEDs.

Small development projects that belong to a single village or city neighborhood are the best suited to co-opting the local elites. Encouragingly, the international coalition has put greater emphasis on such small projects in recent months. Large projects such as dams and national highways are less suitable, as they are too large to be assigned to a single community and they require technical expertise that must be brought in from elsewhere, which encourages the local populace to conclude that they are being cheated out of slices of the development pie.



Large development projects may still contribute to achievement of counterinsurgency objectives in Afghanistan's villages, but before forking out billions of dollars for them we should consider that such projects seldom come close enough to the top of people's priority lists to influence their decisions on whether to support the counterinsurgents, and that expenditures on these projects will consume scarce money, manpower, and equipment that could be used on other projects. Generally speaking, large projects have the greatest COIN

impact when they are used to influence the national leaders of the host-nation government or to co-opt elites with national or regional influence, because the national and regional elites direct the war, appoint local leaders, and provide out of their own ranks many of the leaders who serve at the local level. Other large projects of particular value in counterinsurgency are secondary and higher education, for the universities, defense colleges, police academies, and schools of administration are the most promising sources of the junior leaders required in counterinsurgency. This truth has been only partially grasped in Afghanistan—while the U.S. government and the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan are now investing heavily in education for Afghan military officers, police officers, and civil servants, the investment in Afghanistan's civilian universities is far smaller, comprising a mere \$20 million of USAID's \$3 billion budget for Afghanistan this year.<sup>17</sup>

## Combating Corruption



Counterinsurgency leaders must be savvy and vigilant to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse. The insurgents, corrupt government officials, and other malign actors frequently profit from aid contracts because of poor contracting procedures or lack of oversight. Many projects have not accomplished their intended objectives because Afghan contractors used inferior construction materials or incorrect construction procedures. Leaky roofs and unstable bridges are easily spotted by the population, and they undermine the credibility of the Afghan government and its international patrons, although they may have to be accepted if the contractor is linked to the elites whose support we are trying to obtain.

## Sustainment



Sustaining projects after construction has been completed requires leaders who can organize the necessary personnel and activities. School teachers and nurses must be directed, motivated, and supervised if the schools and health clinics will continue to function, especially in areas where a significant risk of insurgent violence remains. Facility maintenance staffs must be watched to make sure they are showing up for work and not stealing the maintenance supplies. In some instances, sustainment is beyond the capacity of Afghans because they lack the leadership or technical skills or because the international community does not want to entrust them with expensive equipment, in which case foreigners ought to take responsibility for the tasks. Although Afghan self-sufficiency is generally preferable, foreign involvement in sustainment does permit the foreign ally to maintain continuous observation of local events and to influence local affairs by threatening to discontinue sustainment tasks.

## Who Will Command



Counterinsurgency leaders at higher echelons may have a choice of individuals or organizations to lead the implementation of a development project, and the selection could be crucial since some options will be much better than others. Ideally, a single individual should be given complete authority over development projects from start to finish, and should be the same individual who is in charge of security and governance in the area in order to ensure harmonization of all counterinsurgency operations. Such was the case in some prior counterinsurgencies, like the Philippine War of 1899-1902 and the Malayan Emergency. The war in Afghanistan, however, has never witnessed unity of command on the counterinsurgency side, and most probably never will because of the unwillingness of multiple nations and multiple organizations within these nations to subordinate themselves to a single authority. The chains of command of development organizations are often completely separate from those of organizations responsible for security and governance, and from those of other development

organizations operating in the same area. Finding the right leaders for development, therefore, may require efforts to assist organizations and nations other than our own that have weak or corrupt processes for selecting leaders.

Absent a unified command structure, development activity in a given area should be coordinated through a coordinating center or committee. The number of organizations involved should be kept to the smallest number possible, and, if feasible, a degree of hierarchy should be introduced by



designating a “lead” individual or organization, preferably whichever has the best leadership. The Provincial Reconstruction Teams and District Support Teams normally serve as the coordination hubs in Afghanistan, but the extent of coordination varies greatly, and is heavily dependent on personalities. Where coordination is poor, development efforts overlap in some locations and fail to cover other locations. Organizations that want to pursue long-term development may take actions that interfere with the operations of organizations seeking

short-term stabilization. Infighting and recrimination are likely to arise between organizations or allies when they learn of uncoordinated efforts, as for instance occurred in the spring of 2010 when a U.S. Army colonel attempted to buy the support of the Shinwari tribe with \$1 million in aid and then had to terminate the deal when the provincial governor caught wind of the plan and raised objections.

When development organizations undertake projects without adequately consulting those who know whether and how the projects can be defended, the projects are frequently destroyed or commandeered by the enemy. Such a lack of coordination between development and security was a principal reason for the merger of American counterinsurgency organizations during the Vietnam War into the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) structure, a very effective solution but one whose adoption required Presidential intervention. Unless and until President Obama decides to bring the various U.S. agencies into an umbrella organization akin to CORDS, cooperation between U.S. civil and military authorities will remain hostage to the willingness of local leaders to cooperate with one another.<sup>18</sup>

Ideally, the district or provincial governor should be the “lead” individual on development projects, not only because it enhances his prestige and influence, but also because the governor has natural advantages over foreign military and civilian leaders in his knowledge of the language, the human terrain, and the arts of negotiating and arm twisting and managing competing Afghan factions. In practice, however, some governors have lacked the motivation or ability to lead development projects, necessitating that an Afghan from another organization or a foreigner take charge.



As a general principle, it is best to decentralize authority for development spending to the lowest feasible level, which is usually the district or province. Commanders at those levels have a much better understanding of local conditions than people at higher headquarters. The U.S. military has done a reasonably good job in this regard, thanks to past experience and emphasis in the military's COIN doctrine on decentralization.<sup>19</sup> On the U.S. civilian side, however, much of the decision-making remains in the hands of officials in Kabul, much to the detriment of the counterinsurgency.



## Using aid to strengthen the Afghan leadership



Development aid can help improve Afghanistan's political leadership at all levels as part of a comprehensive governance strategy. At present, a variety of Afghan and foreign entities in Kabul produce development and governance plans, not all of which are compatible, and none of which has much influence over the political or military authorities in the provinces. While local commanders should indeed be given considerable latitude in how they operate, some strategic direction would be useful in areas where Afghan and allied leaders cannot agree on issues of governance policy or have headed off in the wrong direction.

An appropriate governance strategy should contain elements of both what Afghanistan has been and what modern state builders would like it to be. For most of Afghanistan's history, the central government or the provincial governments exerted control over rural Afghanistan by funneling money to local elites of various sorts, who in return underwrote local militias that maintained security and enabled the government to collect revenue.<sup>20</sup> Since the onset of major insurgency in 2005, the international community has prodded the Karzai government into replacing these patronage arrangements and the accompanying local militias with bureaucrats and policemen who are organized and paid by the central government. Progress has been hampered, however, by a shortage of good governors and police chiefs, and by the unwillingness of Afghans to abandon the old way of doing things.

The frailty of the new way and the durability of the old suggest that at least some facets of the old should be retained until the insurgency has been brought under control, if not longer. During the present war, governance and security have generally been most effective in provinces where a strong governor has bought support through traditional patronage, such as Balkh province under Atta Mohammed Noor and Nangarhar province under Gul Agha Shirzai. Westerners have often accused these governors of corruption, and they do enjoy wealth well beyond what a governor's salary would provide. But they are not inordinately corrupt by Afghan standards, and they maintain popular support by

providing security and directing much of the wealth amassed from taxation, customs, and foreign aid programs to the betterment of local elites and the general population. They employ large numbers of men who maintain security, collect taxes, and gather information, and they underwrite well-conceived development projects. They are not George Washington or Ramon Magsaysay, but neither are they Nicolae Ceaucescu or Mobutu Sese Seko—they are more like Boss Tweed and Vito Corleone.



In provinces where the governor is well connected to the population and capable of marshaling broad public support, we most likely should continue allowing the Tweeds and Corleones to use development aid to strengthen their patronage networks. When we empower the governor to steer development projects to the leaders of suitable districts or villages in return for their support, we may not wish to call it patronage, but that is what it is. And we are already doing it in some Afghan provinces, just as we did it in some Iraqi provinces a few years ago.

Facilitation of patronage politics will slow the development of a bureaucratic state, but it is more promising than replacing a successful governor with a new figure who lacks patronage networks—the track records of such individuals are less impressive than those of the governors who wield patronage effectively. Sustaining Afghanistan's patronage networks will put the international community on the hook for development funding for years to come; foreign donors will keep paying out of fear that termination of aid will slash patronage payments and cause Afghans to abandon the government en masse, as occurred in 1991 when the Soviet Union terminated aid to the Najibullah regime. Nevertheless, buying support in this manner will reduce the need for foreign troops, provided that Afghans can furnish the necessary leadership.

In provinces where the governor is talented and dedicated but has not yet developed extensive patronage networks, the political system should be assessed to determine the extent, if any, to which patronage arrangements should be promoted. Tribal leaders or village elders may make effective recipients of patronage in one district, but may be too weak to serve that function in another. Ethnically homogenous districts with entrenched power brokers will be easier to control through patronage and more difficult to control through civil servants and national police than districts that are ethnically diverse or lack strong power brokers.

Some Afghan governors do fit into the Ceaucescu/Mobutu category of predatory leadership, or are simply incompetent, and in their provinces the insurgents have exploited the government's misdeeds and weaknesses to win the support of local elites. In these instances, the international community should implore and, if necessary, pressure the national government to replace the governor, while providing reminders that the insurgents owe their success to leadership selection processes that are more merit-based than the Kabul government's. Development aid can be used at the national level to exert influence over appointments, and in fact it has exerted very positive influence on appointments in prior counterinsurgencies, such as the Huk Rebellion, the Salvadoran Insurgency, and the Iraq War.

## Tying aid levels to human capacity



At present, Afghanistan and its allies do not have enough good leaders and development administrators to make effective use of all of the development aid that is flowing into the country. Foreign development personnel concede that fact, but, as stated in a recent press report, the prevailing view among American development officials is that “the answer isn't to scale back spending but to upgrade the agency staffing to handle it better.”<sup>21</sup> Improving the development capabilities of U.S. military officers and increasing the number of U.S. civilians working on development are worthy objectives, but there is no reason to believe that either can raise leadership and administrative capacities to the levels required for the current influx of funds. Since the U.S. government began its “civilian surge” last year, USAID and other civilian agencies have not been able to recruit enough qualified personnel for the jobs already in existence, and too many of those who have been recruited are located at large headquarters where they cannot have the necessary impact. The total amount spent on development aid, therefore, should be slashed immediately.



The biggest cuts should be made in areas where leadership quality is poor, the number of capable administrative personnel is low, or the security situation is very poor. In addition, aid levels can and should be lowered by eliminating the current pressure on aid officials to maximize spending through high “burn rates” and instead pressuring them to focus on results. The results should be assessed not merely with statistics like the number of people who receive jobs or other benefits from the project, as a recent report from the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction has advocated,<sup>22</sup> but rather on a combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses that indicate how much the projects have weakened the insurgents and strengthened the counterinsurgents.

## Institutionalizing Change



As was mentioned at the beginning, substantial elements of the U.S. military in Afghanistan are already using development aid in the manner recommended in this guide. The military's COIN doctrine, however, needs to be updated to reflect current practice. Training and education should also be adjusted, which will be easier to accomplish once new doctrine has been produced. The most important step the military can take, however, is to alter its MOS selection and command selection procedures to



put the most suitable officers in command of the ground combat units that engage in counterinsurgency.

Convincing the civilian side of the U.S. government to put short-term stabilization ahead of long-term development poses a much larger challenge. Neither USAID nor the U.S. State Department shares the military's attentiveness to formal doctrine, and neither has anything comparable to the military's lengthy mid-career training and education programs in which to instill major changes to their modus operandi. The current USAID administrator, Dr. Rajiv Shah, has told members of his agency that their efforts in Afghanistan must contribute directly to stabilization, not just to long-term development, and this view has been well received among younger USAID officers, but much of the senior USAID leadership in Afghanistan continues to shy away from stabilization. The State Department has much less experience in development or governance despite its prominent role in both in Afghanistan, but usually seems inclined to accept the prevailing USAID view.

Whether USAID and State will come around remains to be seen. In the interest of caution, we should assume that they will not. Given that the U.S. military often uses development aid in ways that benefit the Afghan counterinsurgency, and that the civilian agencies generally do not, we need to question whether the civilian agencies should remain heavily involved in development in Afghanistan and other countries where insurgency demands that development be subordinate to security and governance. A downsizing of their participation would seem warranted if they are unwilling to support stabilization. In recent history, the U.S. military has demonstrated the ability to use development aid to quell insurgencies without civilian help. During the Anbar Awakening, USAID had a grand total of one person in Anbar province, and yet the U.S. military was able to defeat a formidable insurgency through a combination of security, governance, and development initiatives. The absence of large development bureaucracies eliminated the need to work with or for development officers who oppose the use of aid for stabilization. The military would do well to enlarge its own capabilities for funding and managing development programs, to meet the large demand in this war and to prepare for going it alone in the next.



<sup>1</sup> Edwina Thompson, Report on Wilton Park Conference 1022, 1 April 2010, <http://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/resources/en/pdf/22290903/22291297/wp1022-report>.

<sup>2</sup> Field Manual 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency*. FM 3-24, 2-1, 5-17.

<sup>3</sup> In actuality, development aid was less important than security and governance in winning over Iraqis. See Mark Moyer, *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 213-258.

<sup>4</sup> For this view of development, see E. Wayne Nafziger et al, eds., *War, Hunger and Displacement: The Origin of Humanitarian Emergencies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Paul Collier et al., *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington, DC: World Bank and Oxford University Press), 2003; Bruce Russett, *Purpose and Policy in the Global Community* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Manus I. Midlarsky, "Rulers and the Ruled: Patterned Inequality and the Onset of Mass Political Violence," *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 82, no. 2 (June 1988), 491-509; Carles Boix, "Economic Roots of Civil Wars and Revolutions in the Contemporary World," *World Politics*, vol. 60, no. 3 (April 2008), 390-437.

<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, the report stated that counterinsurgency doctrine should be revised based on the hard facts of recent experience, which appeared to imply that the population-centric paradigm had to be reworked rather than discarded. On the other hand, the report noted that effective use of development aid required "strengthening provincial and district governance systems and fostering effective and transparent Afghan leadership," which supports the alternative paradigm presented in this document. Thompson, Report on Wilton Park Conference 1022.

<sup>6</sup> Influential expositions of this formula include Field Manual 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency*; Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York: Knopf, 2007); Christopher Paul et al., *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers: Detailed Counterinsurgency Case Studies* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2010); Anthony James Joes, *Resisting Rebellion: The History and Politics of Counterinsurgency* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004); Timothy J. Lomperis, *From People's War to People's Rule: Insurgency, Intervention, and the Lessons of Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Robert B. Asprey, *War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1975); Andrew Krepinevich, *The Army in Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> The leader-centric view of counterinsurgency is explained in detail in Moyer, *A Question of Command*. This guide highlights the book's findings on development in counterinsurgency, while providing additional analysis of the use of development aid and incorporating evidence gathered during the author's three trips to Afghanistan during 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the assertions on Afghanistan and Iraq contained in the ensuing sections are based on conversations with hundreds of veterans of both conflicts and/or the research presented in Moyer, *A Question of Command*.

<sup>9</sup> For evidence on the priorities of Afghans, see Paul Fishstein, "Winning Hearts and Minds in Afghanistan? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Balkh Province," Feinstein International Center, November 2010; Andrew Wilder, "Money Can't Buy America Love," *Foreign Policy*, December 1, 2009; Andrew Wilder, "Losing Hearts and Minds in Afghanistan," Middle East Institute, December 2009; Seth Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan* (New York: Norton, 2009); International Crisis Group.



“Countering Afghanistan’s Insurgency: No Quick Fixes.” Asia Report, no. 123 (November 2, 2006). For the prioritization in previous conflicts, see Moyar, *A Question of Command*.

<sup>10</sup> Kathy Gannon, “In Kandahar, NATO Isn’t Enough,” *Washington Times*, February 18, 2011. For another good example, see David Wood, “Afghans’ Fear Of Reprisal Stands In The Way Of U.S. Strategy,” *politicsdaily.com*, August 7, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Wilder, “A ‘Weapons System’ Based on Wishful Thinking,” *Boston Globe*, September 16, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> International Crisis Group, “Countering Afghanistan’s Insurgency,” 21.

<sup>13</sup> Certain methods tend to work better than others, and there is some correlation between insurgent strength and use of certain COIN “best practices,” but it is mistaken to assume that the correlation equals causation, as is often assumed. Most of those practices yield success only when good leadership is present. In counterinsurgencies where COIN practices stayed the same over time while leadership quality varied, such as Malaya and Vietnam, major fluctuations in counterinsurgent effectiveness coincided with the changes in leadership quality. When leadership quality has remained constant, efforts to alter COIN practices have had little effect.

<sup>14</sup> For detailed analyses of the Taliban and the other Afghan insurgents since 2001, see Antonio Giustozzi, ed., *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Robert D. Crews and Amin Tarzi, eds. *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> The use of development for the equal benefit of all is prescribed in FM 3-24, as well as a 2009 handbook published by the Center for Army Lessons Learned entitled *Commander’s Guide to Money as a Weapons System*. The handbook asserts that projects should be selected based on the extent to which they “employ many people from the local population” and “benefit the local population.” *Commander’s Guide to Money as a Weapons System: Tactics Techniques and Procedures*, Handbook 09-27, Center for Army Lessons Learned, April 2009, <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/call/docs/09-27/09-27.pdf>, 13.

<sup>16</sup> The vagaries of shuras and community politics in contemporary Afghanistan are described well in Anna Larson, “Governance Structures in Nimroz Province,” Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, November 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Josh Boak, “Afghan Universities Struggling For Funding,” *Washington Post*, February 13, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction, “U.S. Civilian Uplift in Afghanistan is Progressing but Some Key Issues Merit Further Examination as Implementation Continues,” October 26, 2010, <http://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/SIGAR%20Audit-11-2.pdf>, 14.

<sup>19</sup> See FM 3-24, 1-26, 7-4.

<sup>20</sup> For a good recent analysis, see Antonio Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud: War and Warlords in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Ben Arnoldy, “Afghanistan War: USAID Spends Too Much, Too Fast to Win Hearts and Minds,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 28 July 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction, “Commander’s Emergency Response Program in Laghman Province Provided Some Benefits, but Oversight Weaknesses and Sustainment Concerns Led to Questionable Outcomes and Potential Waste,” January 27, 2011, <http://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/SIGARAudit-11-7.pdf>, 14.