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Teaching New Dogs Old Tricks: Can the Hamlet Evaluation System Inform the Search for Metrics in Afghanistan?

by David Gayvert

After years of tracking and reporting various pacification metrics without a uniform methodology or purpose, in 1967 the US implemented the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) as a critical element in a comprehensive reporting schema that came to include a number of US and Vietnamese metric reports. Although it went through a number of modifications, HES remained in force for the remainder of US active involvement in the conflict, and notwithstanding other meaningful data sources, came to be regarded by many as the single most reliable means of assessing trends in Vietnam pacification efforts. While it had short-comings and its share of detractors, a number of independent studies confirmed that HES was a well-designed and implemented system that met accepted tests of validity and reliability, and provided commanders and policy-makers solid data upon which to base decisions.

Nine years into fighting the Afghan insurgency, neither the US nor its coalition partners have developed a similar uniform means to measure counterinsurgency (COIN) progress. Notwithstanding the hundreds of post-9/11 analyses touting lessons learned, parallels and contrasts between US experiences in Vietnam and the current conflict in Afghanistan, none seems to have considered the development and implementation of HES as potentially instructive in the quest for developing useful measures of current COIN effectiveness. Meanwhile, debate continues over how to track improvement in Afghanistan—which metrics are valid and reliable, how to collect, normalize and interpret them, and how to get all relevant organizations to agree to a common standard.

This essay argues that a conceptually simple approach like HES may hold elements of solution to the vexing problem of metrics for COIN in Afghanistan. It does not suggest that a “HES for Afghanistan” should necessarily replace current data collection and analysis efforts, nor that the metrics and methodology employed in HES can be seamlessly overlain or incorporated into existing intelligence and reporting structures. It does suggest that a careful examination of the development, implementation, modification, and validation of HES may yield clues for those seeking to put in place meaningful measurements of COIN progress in Afghanistan.

Pacification in Vietnam: Overview

Although military advisory support to Vietnam had been in place since 1950, significant US involvement began in 1959, and steadily escalated after President Johnson’s decision to “go big” in 1965. At its peak, the US troop level in Vietnam exceeded 550,000. The Vietnam conflict presented special difficulties in a military sense, in that the US and Government of Vietnam

(GVN) forces were required to fight simultaneously a conventional war against the North Vietnam Army, and a counterinsurgency (COIN) battle against the Viet Cong. Aside from the purely military challenges, developing the right methods and metrics to measure progress presented an additional set of problems. While the infamous “body count” was often used to cite progress on the conventional front, measuring success in the COIN battle—defined as bringing rural population centers under the control of the government vs. the insurgent forces—was more difficult and controversial, and compounded by fierce bureaucratic wrangling. While the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) was clearly responsible for the conduct of military operations, the U.S. pacification assistance mission in South Vietnam was run by the US Embassy country team in Saigon. The State Department, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the U.S. Information Service (USIS) all were responsible for various aspects of this mission, along with the MACV.

This lack of a unified command structure eventually led President Johnson in May 1967 to place all authority for pacification efforts under the commanding general of MACV, with a civilian deputy commander, who would directly supervise the pacification effort through a new program, Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS).

The establishment of CORDS greatly improved the coherence and management of pacification efforts, and eventually their effectiveness as well.¹ Among the extant pacification programs rolled under CORDS was the newly minted Hamlet Evaluation System (HES), hastily developed in late 1966, and adopted in January 1967. For many commanders and decision-makers, HES would become the primary means of tracking overall progress in the counterinsurgency campaign.

1962-1966, Pre-CORDS/HES Pacification Metrics

From mid-1962 until the adoption of HES in January 1967, the MACV, through its district senior advisors (DSA) and their Government of Vietnam (GVN) counterparts, tracked a number of variables gathered from various pacification programs, and organized them into seven broad categories: *General* (date/time/area/ demographics); *Control/Pacification* (secured/undergoing securing, population and areas under control, etc.); *Order of Battle* (friendly/enemy); *Operations* (friendly/VC); *Readiness* (friendly/enemy); *Political/Socio-Economic* (elections, governance, cost of living, development, etc.); and *Miscellaneous* (friendly/enemy; defections, desertions, captured, casualties). A contemporary study analyzing this data demonstrated two key findings: 1) a mathematical model using standard statistical tools (e.g., linear regression) could be employed to reliably analyze pacification metrics, and 2) of all the dozens of metrics tracked and reported, the relative size of GVN (including Army of South Vietnam, Popular Forces, Regional Forces) and Viet Cong forces present in a province most reliably correlated with pacification progress (defined as defined as bringing rural population centers under the control of the government).² These insights were eventually incorporated into the HES.

¹ Andrade, Dale and James H. Willbanks, “CORDS/Phoenix: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future,” *Military Review* March-April 2006, pp 9-23.

² Research Analysis Corporation, RAC-TP-309, “Measurement of Pacification Progress in Vietnam,” September 1968, pp 28-29.

Yet pre-HES data collection and reporting left much to be desired. A 1964 Advanced Research Project Agency (ARPA) report noted that US intelligence and operations reporting was often circular, lacked sufficient objective facts and rigorous analytical judgments based upon them, that some data were not being collected due to a failure to recognize their importance, and that there was frequent failure to adequately or accurately record the sources of information reported.³ By mid-1966, elements throughout MACV and other US agencies were expressing broad dissatisfaction with the reporting system(s) then in place. Criticisms included that the current system was too time-consuming to administer (all data was manually processed), not comprehensive enough, and produced data that was too high-level (data was aggregated at the province level) to be useful.⁴ Moreover, there was no clear methodology in place to meaningfully track real outcomes; frequently “progress reports” focused on outputs, or measures of performance like projects completed or dollars spent, rather than impact achieved. A 1967 survey of pacification metrics noted that

[T]he methodology for the measurement of progress remains elusive as the search for quantitative criteria continues...it is common for procedures to vary widely, for the leadership is forced by circumstances to extemporize. There are consequently as many variants in the solutions to problems as there are province chiefs.⁵

The Hamlet Evaluation System

In 1967, MACV adopted the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) as the primary method and source of measuring pacification progress. The HES was developed in late 1966 by two analysts from the Research Analysis Corporation, in response to a US Secretary of Defense tasking to create and have in place by January of the following year, a new system that more accurately and easily measured pacification progress.

The HES was designed to measure, evaluate, and report “progress of the GVN toward the goal of restoring and maintaining security, extending firm government control, improving the living conditions and advancing the economic development of its people.”⁶ HES was a US-only system, although the data was shared with the GVN, which cooperated with MACV in its operation. Significantly, it was fully automated, leveraging the nascent computer technology of the time. This allowed for expedited and expanded analysis and display of the data, increasing its value to commanders.

HES evaluated pacification at the hamlet rather than village level because although the village was traditionally the lowest administrative unit in Vietnam, many villages were comprised of individual hamlets separated by rice paddies or other terrain features that made the village as a whole a militarily indefensible unit. It was common for some of the hamlets belonging to a village to fall under VC control while others did not. Thus it made sense from a pacification measurement perspective to treat the hamlet as the basic population unit.

³ ARPA presentation, “Developing Metrics and Reporting for MACV,” Advanced Research Projects Agency, 1 May 1964, pp 48-49. Reading through this report one is struck that if a couple names, places, and references were changed, one would have a report sadly approximating MG Flynn’s recent “Fixing Intel” analysis.

⁴ Brigham, Erwin, “Pacification Measurement in Vietnam: The Hamlet Evaluation System,” a report prepared for SEATO Internal Security Seminar 3-10 June 1968, COORDS, HQ MACV, pp 1-2.

⁵ Menkes, Joshua and Raymond G. Jones, “Pacification in Vietnam: A Survey,” Institute for Defense Analysis, Research Paper 3-340 to CORDS Information Center, December 1967, p 39.

⁶ Brigham, op. cit., p 2.

HES employed four primary tools:

- The Hamlet Evaluation Worksheet (HEW) with an accompanying questionnaire listing specific Hamlet Problems impacting pacification
- A Remarks Section, where DSAs could record amplifying or explanatory information, or raise questions about the process or any particular hamlet evaluation criteria
- The Hamlet Evaluation Summary form (HESF), a computer-generated form containing identification data for all hamlets in the district, used to aggregate and report evaluations to higher HQs
- The Hamlet Classification Form (HCF), a computer-generated form used to record and report the security category and revolutionary development classification assigned by the DSA's GVN counterpart.⁷ The HCF also recorded approximated non-hamlet population—those living either in cities, refugee camps, or independently of any discrete population center.

In the scope of this essay, only the HEW will be discussed in detail, as it comprised the “heart” of the system. The HEW tracked 18 broad indicators of pacification progress, nine measuring security and nine measuring development. These indicators were organized under six basic factors:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. VC Military Activity | 4. Administrative and Political Activities |
| a. Village Guerilla Unit | a. GVN Governmental Management |
| b. VC External Forces | b. Census Grievance Program |
| c. Military Incidents Affecting the Hamlet | c. Information and PSYOP Activities |
| 2. VC Political and Subversive Activity | 5. Health, Education and Welfare |
| a. Hamlet Infrastructure | a. Medical Services and Sanitation |
| b. Village Infrastructure | b. Education |
| c. Activities Affecting the Hamlet | c. Welfare |
| 3. Friendly Security Capabilities | 6. Economic Development |
| a. Hamlet Defense Plan and Organization | a. Self-help Activity |
| b. Friendly External Force Assistance | b. Public Works |
| c. Internal Security Activities | c. Economic Improvement Programs |

The Hamlet Problem questionnaire added 10 amplifying metrics that were hamlet-specific, and provided more “granularity” to each assessment. Both were administered by the US District Senior Advisors (DSA) on a monthly basis for each of the approximately 12,700 hamlets throughout South Vietnam over which the GVN had some control (about 67% in 1967). While completing the initial evaluations in January 1967 was indeed onerous for the DSAs, they

⁷ While cooperating and sharing in the HES, the GVN maintained its own pacification tracking system and metrics.

did not have to fill out complete HES forms every month for each hamlet—once a “baseline” report had been submitted, advisors thereafter only had to report changes from their previous submissions.⁸

Figure One. The Hamlet Evaluation Worksheet

The 18-question HEW and the 10-question Hamlet Problem document required the DSA to select from pre-determined multiple choice ratings in order to arrive at an overall “score” for a hamlet, based upon his assessment of “ground truth” of the relevant conditions in the hamlet that month. In the case of the HEW, DSAs had to assign a rating from “A” (best) to “E” (worst) to each of the 18 indicators. These ratings were then converted into a numerical scale (A = 5, E = 1; VC-controlled hamlets received “0” ratings) allowing them to be summed and averaged to reach an overall score for each hamlet. The Hamlet Problem questionnaire employed a similar methodology. So, for example, the condition and activity of Viet Cong infrastructure in a hamlet (one of nine security indicators) could be rated as follows:

- A: Entire [communist] party apparatus appears to have been eliminated.
- B: All normal party apparatus neutralized; adjacent hamlets may have active VC infrastructure.
- C: Most Communist Party apparatus identified; some village-level agents still operating.
- D: Top leaders of hamlet VC infrastructure neutralized; hamlet undercover agents still operative.
- E: Underground by day; free to intimidate by night.

⁸ Brigham, op. cit., p 7.

GVN local management, a key development metric, allowed the following ratings:

A: Effective elected hamlet governing body; all officials fully resident.

B: Complete managerial group fully resident; elected hamlet chief; external support such as revolutionary development cadre present

C: Local managerial groups mostly resident at night; appointed or elected.

D: Some local participation in management; officials not resident at night.

E: Officials appointed; marginally effective; non-resident. 9

Hamlets receiving an average aggregated score of 4.5-5.0 for all 18 indicators were rated “A” hamlets, those with 3.5-4.49, “B” hamlets, those with 2.5-3.49, “C” hamlets, 1.5-2.49 “D” hamlets, and those receiving 1.0-1.49, “E” hamlet status for the month. HES then tracked the absolute number and trend lines month-to-month for hamlets in each of those categories.

While there were various descriptive criteria for each indicator, “A” hamlets generally had driven out all remnants of VC infrastructure, with external VC elements either absent or ineffective, had no violent incidents for the month, and had well-developed and on-going development efforts. “B” hamlets had eliminated or severely degraded VC presence and capability, possessed friendly defense forces that were at least partially effective, and had civic and development projects underway. In hamlets with a “C” status, military control of the VC had been broken, external VC units had been reduced by up to 50%, and had some economic and development programs underway. “D” hamlets were those in which VC presence and effectiveness had been degraded, but the VC still operated regularly at night. “E” hamlets had daytime GVN administrative and security presence, but the VC ruled at night. A, B, and C hamlets were considered “good,” and sometimes “secured;” D and E hamlets were considered “poor” or “contested” in various HES reporting.

Even given the limitations of automated data processing (ADP)/computer technology at the time, by combining HES data with that produced by other information streams and systems also used by MACV,¹⁰ analysts were able to generate a number of impressive monthly products that tracked hamlet status, changes, indicator correlations, pacification trends, etc., in both textual and graphic formats. Though some continued to complain about the “administrative burden” imposed by the system, in overall timeliness and analytical sophistication, the HES represented a giant leap forward in tracking, reporting, and (potential) understanding of pacification efforts in the countryside.¹¹

Indeed, in what may be one of the more unfortunate oversights in the US analysis during that conflict, HES provided data that had they been properly understood, may have provided warning of the 1968 Tet Offensive. Specifically, while HES indicated a net gain of 1.3 million people living in hamlets rated A/B/C in 1967, 81.8% of that gain occurred in first six months of 1967. Similarly, of the 464 hamlets receiving improved scores during the year, all but 33 were reported in the first half of the year. In other words, insurgent presence and activity as measured

⁹ Examples excerpted from HEW, included as an appendix to this report.

¹⁰ These included, *inter alia* the Area Assessment System, the CORDS Information System, the Pacification Attitude Analysis System, and the GVN *Chieu Hoi* Management Information System, National Police Evaluation System, and Revolutionary Development Cadre Information System.

¹¹ Brigham, *op. cit.* p 13.

by the HES widely and significantly increased during the six months prior to the 1968 Tet Offensive, despite having been on a steady decline in the preceding six months. Proper analysis would have highlighted this shifted trend, and sought an explanation for it.¹²

Quite understandably given the speed with which it was designed and implemented, the original HES went through a number of revisions. Initial alterations were made in May of 1967, five months post-implementation. Changes were relatively few and minor, consisting of re-wording of some indicator descriptions, and a few additions/deletions to the Hamlet Problem questionnaire. Some still insisted that the evaluations were too subjective, did not adequately address the condition of the village unit and the non-hamlet intra-village population, and that the language used for indicator descriptive choices often did not allow for sufficiently accurate depictions of the actual conditions being described. Perhaps most substantively, critics argued that “C” hamlets should not be counted as “secured,” and that given the equal weighting of all indicators, it was possible for high development scores to offset low security scores, thus potentially masking critical security situations.¹³

Throughout 1968, a series of studies were undertaken to assess HES. A RAND report documented that HES was well-designed and provided valid and reliable metrics, but suggested increasing the robustness of the data, using more questions per measurement area, and adding additional measures not tracked by HES. Other independent assessments reached similar conclusions. Many of the suggestions outlined in these studies were incorporated into the design of subsequent versions of HES.¹⁴

HES 70 and HES 71

Critical evaluation of HES continued for as long as it was in use. Key questions about HES were constantly being formulated, debated, and tested throughout 1968 and 1969, as a revised system was designed. From mid-1969 until its full implementation in January of 1970, both HES and HES 70 (as the revised system was known) were run simultaneously and their outputs compared and assessed.

The new HES 70 aimed to increase the objectivity and specificity of the data, expand the data base to include more functional areas of pacification, increase uniformity of evaluation throughout districts, and increase the utility of the system by designing reports specifically for field commanders. These changes included adding area (village, or inter-hamlet) security as well as population security measures, and organizing questions and reporting into three core progress areas—Pacification/Security; Socio-Economic; Political—instead of the simpler Security and Development categories used in the original HES. HES 70 also introduced centrally-conducted scoring, using an algorithm built upon Bayesian statistical inference, as had been recommended in one of the HES studies. In other words, the local DSA no longer scored indicators from A to

¹² Analysis from an unattributed classified working paper found in Folder 72 of the Thomas Thayer collection at the Center for Army History, Fort Leslie McNair, VA; base data used in the analysis is also available in unclassified documents; see for example the Brigham report referenced above.

¹³ Legere, Laurence, “Reporting Effectiveness in Vietnam Pacification Efforts,” Report prepared for ARPA, Institute for Defense Analysis, Nov 10, 1971, pp 25-26.

¹⁴ Sweetland, Anders, “Item Analysis of the HES (Hamlet Evaluation System),” Report No. 17634-ARPA/AGILE, RAND Corporation, 20 August 1968. See also “Hamlet Evaluation System Study,” Department of the Army Concept Team in Vietnam, 1 May 1968 (conducted by Simulmatics Corporation) and “A Probabilistic Evaluation of Pacification Indicators, Pacific Technical Analysts, Inc. 15 March 1968.

E, he simply answered factual questions, and allowed others at MACV HQs to derive the hamlet and village ratings.

Under HES 70, the DSA now was required to answer (or update) four security questions for each village (measure of area security/control) and 21 for each hamlet (measure of population security/control) monthly. In addition, each quarter, he had to answer or update 56 hamlet and 58 village-level questions covering security, political, and socio-economic factors. What had been called the HEW was now referred to as the HES Questionnaire. All the questions were multiple-choice, as had been the case with the HEW, but were designed to remove as much subjective judgment as possible.¹⁵ HES 70 generated similar reports and analytical products as had its predecessor, but also allowed for customized products to address the requirements of individual field commanders. For example, reports could be constructed at multiple levels of complexity, drawing upon data from any or all of the three basic sets of data (security, political, socio-economic), as demonstrated in the model aggregation table below.¹⁶

While HES 70 was generally seen as an improvement on the original, some felt that it may have gone too far in stripping away the subjective input of experienced DSAs, producing two-dimensional (length-breadth) reporting, that lacked the significant third dimension of depth, provided by subjective input from local subject matter experts.¹⁷

HES 71 did not introduce any major changes to the system methodology. Rather, it incorporated a shift in focus, placing more weight in scoring and analytical models upon political factors such as VC infrastructure degradation (or enhancement) and incidents of terrorism.¹⁸ Relatively minor “tweaks” continued to be offered as the system matured, and commanders and decision-makers came to increasingly accept and rely upon it.¹⁹ Specifically, HES 71 was the outgrowth of an October 1970 a feasibility study ordered by the Deputy to COMUSMACV for CORDS (DEPCORDS) to assess whether a modification of the scoring aggregation of HES 70 could be made to reflect the increasing enemy emphasis on political activity. Appropriate modifications were identified, approved, and implemented, with the new system becoming operational on 1 January 1971. Another significant development in HES 71 was the beginning of the “Vietnamization” of the system. With the continuous drawdown of U.S. advisor teams, the administration of HES was almost completely transferred to the GVN by March 1973.²⁰

¹⁵ Legere, *op. cit.*, 26-27. A full listing of the questions and modeling aggregations used in HES 70/71 is provided as a stand-alone PDF Appendix to this report.

¹⁶ From MACV HES Command Manual, CORDS Research and Analysis Division, 1 Sep 1971.

¹⁷ Legere, *op. cit.*, p 36.

¹⁸ Thayer, Thomas, Ed., “A Systems Analysis View of the Vietnam War, 1965-1972,” Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems and Analysis), Washington DC, February 1975.

¹⁹ NARA Electronic Records RG 330 Hamlet Evaluation System 1971 (HES 71) 1971-1974, file 1.

²⁰ DEPCORDS Memorandum, “Changes in the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) for 1971,” 20 January 1971.

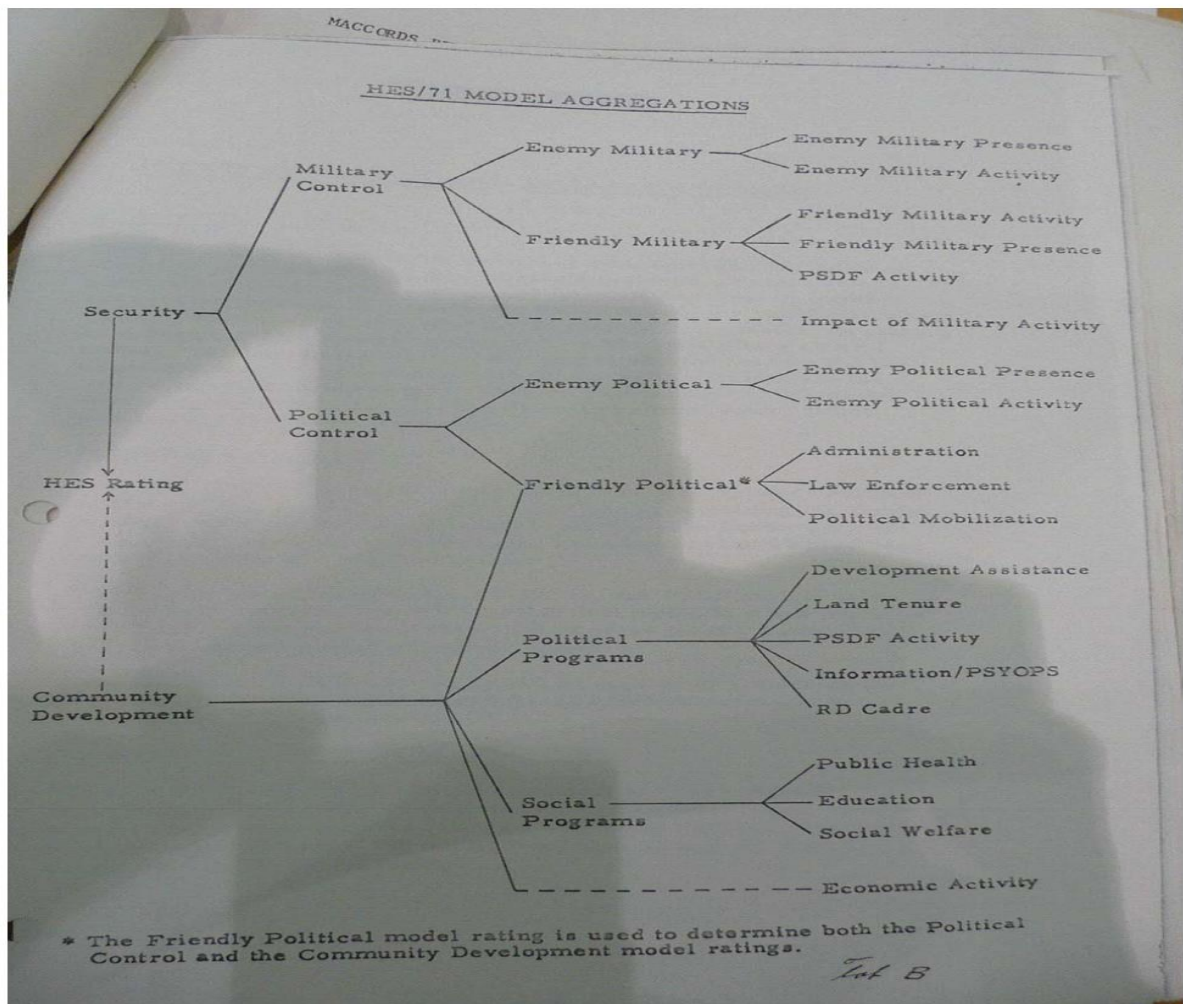


Figure Two. HES 71 Model Aggregation Structure

HES: Summary

While HES/HES 70/HES 71 produced different absolute assessments of pacification progress (due to the different metric inputs and statistical processes employed to organize and report them), the trend lines produced by each method were highly congruent. The Vietnam Special Studies Group, an ad hoc OSD activity created in 1970 to conduct *inter alia* an independent assessment of HES reporting, also found that GVN-tracked control indicators followed these same trends.²¹

Importantly, although HES had its weaknesses and detractors, and went through two major revisions, it remained in force throughout the remaining period of the US active military involvement in Vietnam,²² and was widely acknowledged to be the best single measure of

²¹ Trend analysis and reference to VSSG findings taken from an unattributed classified working paper found in Folder 72 of the Thomas Thayer collection at the Center for Army History, Fort Leslie McNair, VA. Corroborating data also found in NARA Electronic Records collection, RG 330, Vietnam Special Studies Group (VSSG) 1971-1974, p 21.

²² Last data in system is from January, 1974.

pacification in the countryside. As one commander commented, “the only Corps-wide document which depicts trends in problem areas is the HES and reliance on its data allowed maximum efficiency in the utilization of pacification assets.”²³ Robert Komer, the director of CORDS noted, “critics really seem to be complaining less about the HES itself than about the way in which its aggregate scores have often been used in simplistic fashion to advance the notion of ‘progress.’ Unfortunately, there is much to this criticism.”²⁴ In other words, HES was a solid tool that sometimes was used inappropriately or disingenuously. Importantly, as noted above, HES data did not comprise the universe of reporting and analysis relevant to pacification. A host of other operational and intelligence data were collected and fed into a comprehensive Pacification Evaluation System (PACES) that provided rich, collective information about and understanding of the NVA, VC insurgency, and the GVN efforts to defeat them.²⁵

Application to Current Operations in Afghanistan

So what does this condensed history of HES have to do with counterinsurgency today? Obviously, Afghanistan is not Vietnam, and 2010 is not 1967. However, as many commentaries have pointed out, there are many similarities between the two insurgencies which the US fought—and fights—against in those different times and places: approximately same size populations at stake (although in size and type, terrain is vastly different in Afghanistan); predominantly rural with little traditional reliance on central government; weak central government outside of major cities; ideological-nationalist insurgencies (although the TB is less monolithic than the VC); both skilled in propaganda and applying targeted intimidation to advance their causes; and importantly, in both cases, counterinsurgents employing a population-based. The point is that there are enough similarities that if carefully applied, much of what we learned about how to measure Vietnamese pacification, at great time and expense, may perhaps be leveraged in Afghanistan to provide continuing value.

The modest recommendation of this essay is that the methodology—the indicators and model aggregations used—in the later version of HES (HES 70/71), be investigated as a basis for building a similar uniform system to gather, analyze and report anti-Taliban, pro-population progress in Afghanistan. In reviewing many of the indicators employed in HES 70/71, for instance, one sees questions concerning the relation to and time spent in villages and district centers by local and government leaders; prices and availability of commodities in rural markets; perceived misconduct of government officials or security forces; tax collection by insurgents; civilian casualties; basis and security of land tenure²⁶—in other words, many of the metrics being suggested, and in some cases employed by present day researchers and analysts²⁷ were conceived of, validated and successfully adopted via HES decades ago.

While a “HES for Afghanistan” certainly would not be a “be-all/end-all” method for tracking COIN progress here, it would build upon a tested methodology that could be rapidly

²³ USMC HQs, MACV Memorandum to CORDS Director, “Use of HES and TFES as Management Tools,” 15 May 1968. NARA Document #101156; Locator data: RG 472/270/78/33/04, box 113.

²⁴ Komer, Robert, “Impact of Pacification on Insurgency in South Vietnam,” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol XXV Number 1, 1971, p. 58.

²⁵ Brigham, Edwin, “Pacification Measurement,” *Military Review*, May 1970, pp 54-55.

²⁶ From HES Questionnaire, MACV HES Command Manual, CORDS Research and Analysis Division, 1 Sep 1971.

²⁷ See for example, Kilcullen, David, “Measuring Progress in Afghanistan,” White Paper to ISAF, December 2009, pp 7-13.

stood up and implemented—the framework for original HES was constructed in about two weeks, and implemented two weeks after that. Most importantly, it could provide a valid, reliable, and consistent month-to-month (or even week-to-week, if desired) means of tracking insurgency trends that the force currently lacks, despite the volumes of studies and proposals and buckets of money currently chasing the problem.

Broadly, a HES-like system should track as closely as possible with the relatively simple implementation methodology of HES 70/71—allowing for obvious modifications in content, structure, and technology—and allow PRTs, tactical commanders, or other designated personnel in Key Terrain districts and Area of Interest districts to gather and report the status of villages on a regular basis, with a minimum of additional effort. This data could be forwarded to the Stability Operations Information Centers at each Regional Command for collation and scoring, then incorporated into a national product by ISAF HQ or a subordinate element as directed. As with the original HES, the initial data collection²⁸ and reporting cycle will be time-intensive, but subsequent periodic reporting of only changes to village or district status should not pose an undue burden, particularly if requirements for other redundant or less relevant data gathering and reporting are reduced as a result of the new system implementation. A key complaint voiced in ISAF CJ2 MG Flynn’s “Fixing Intel” report was that volumes of potentially relevant data was available, and in some cases being reported, stored, and even analyzed—but that it was not being translated into meaningful knowledge about the coalition’s effectiveness in protecting and influencing the population.²⁹ A “HES for Afghanistan” could directly address that knowledge gap.

Finally, a key recommendation from a 1971 report indicated that constructing and operating a comprehensive evaluation and reporting system like HES as a solely American system was a mistake, urging that if ever again the US found itself in a situation remotely analogous to Vietnam, it compel the host nation (with US assistance) to develop and implement such a system for two key reasons: the significant personnel with local knowledge required to administer such a system (the host nation possessing more of them than presumably would the US), and the critical need to develop a credible (undistorted) evaluation and reporting capability within the host nation, to bolster its own credibility.³⁰ While perhaps not feasible in the short term, this suggestion is none the less relevant. The necessity for the Afghan government to build both capability and capacity in prosecuting the COIN fight is undisputed. Just as important, in terms of manpower, it is worth noting that at its height, CORDS employed over 7600 US advisors in Vietnam, 1200 of them civilian. Not all of their time and efforts were devoted to administering HES, of course, but such numbers provide some idea of the level of effort applied; the manpower currently residing in Provincial/District Reconstruction Teams (PRT/DRT) throughout Afghanistan is less than 2500 (about 50 of whom are civilian),³¹ in a country more than three times larger than South Vietnam, and arguably more challenging in its geography and environmental considerations.

²⁸ Or transfer/conversion from extant databases such as the widely used CIDNE

²⁹ Flynn, Michael, et al, “Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan,” Center for New American Security, Jan 2010, p 9.

³⁰ Legere, op. cit., p 33.

³¹ Nuzom, Henry, *Shades of CORDS in the Kush: the False Hope of “Unity of Effort” in US Counterinsurgency*,” Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, April 2010, p 59.

Concluding Thoughts

In what seems to be a continuing pattern in US foreign policy—perhaps inexorable, given the nature and dynamics of our political system—the commitment of personnel and resources to Vietnam preceded a thorough operational analysis and development of the processes, lines of authority, and measures of effectiveness required to successfully and (reasonably) efficiently accomplish the objectives to which our political leaders had pledged our national blood and treasure. It took a number of years of “muddling through”—and a great deal of personnel attention from senior government officials, including the President—before the right structures and systems were put in place to promote and document success. A recent report details this problematic phenomenon once again playing out in the US-led effort in Afghanistan.³² Moreover, some current research indicates that our national and institutional biases toward action—the desire to “get something done”—often results in the adoption of policies and plans based upon a poor understanding of and false assumptions about the problems we are tackling, and the relevant data actually needed to effectively analyze and solve them.³³ This dynamic tends to be exacerbated by a tendency to either disregard or downplay past experiences and lessons learned, if they are NIH—Not Invented Here;³⁴ everyone wants to be the originator of the next “big idea” or better mousetrap. Despite this very human tendency however, nine years into fighting the Afghan insurgency, no successful analog to the Vietnam HES is evident in relevant structures and processes in our current fight. Perhaps this is due to institutional reluctance to look for positive guidance from a painful episode of US national history. But whatever the reason, intelligence collection and analysis in Afghanistan remains largely irrelevant to the COIN fight and determining whether or not we are winning,³⁵ while military leaders and analysts will soon attend yet another high-level conference devoted to discussion of proper collection and applications of metrics.³⁶

In Vietnam, HES did not provide a “silver bullet” solution to measuring counterinsurgency—or as it was referred to then—pacification effectiveness. But as a potent tool within a broader evaluation schema that included many sources of related data, it served as a useful “one stop” means for consistently assessing trends throughout the country at the village and district level. If such a tool could be readily developed and applied across a theater of war 40 years ago, given the knowledge and vastly more powerful technology we now possess, it is hard to understand why commanders lack a similar capability today.

³² IBID., pp vii-ix.

³³ Thompson, Edwina, *Winning “Hearts and Minds” in Afghanistan*, Proceedings of Wilmot Park Conference 1022, 11-14 March 2010. Growing recognition of the negative unintended consequences of indiscriminant use of CERP and other development funds in Afghanistan is an example of well-intended action exceeding the reach of thorough analysis.

³⁴ Although it should also be noted that the opposite tendency—to apply knowledge and lessons learned in one context indiscriminately to another—must also be guarded against, such as assuming that the same tribal dynamics at play in Iraq could be overlaid on Afghanistan.

³⁵ Flynn et al, op cit. p 7.

³⁶ Currently scheduled to be convened at NATO Joint Force Command, Brunnsom, NE, Aug 30-3 Sep 2010.

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