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Not Just a Job, an Adventure:

Drafting the U.S. Civil Service for Counterinsurgencies

by Michael A. Clauser

It's become trite to state that the solution for U.S. involvement in Afghanistan is "political," and not solely "military," in nature. Both Presidents Bush and Obama made the case that the purpose of U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan was to provide a security space allowing for national and local governance to take hold and grow.¹ But while President Bush found five brigades to surge into Iraq and President Obama committed 30,000 additional forces to Afghanistan, neither President could find adequate numbers of willing foreign and civil servants to accompany our men and women in uniform. U.S. non-military civilian numbers in both countries remain low. One senior official estimated that U.S. civilian personnel in Afghanistan total around 1,000 strong, just one percent of the military footprint in that country.² Even now, most of these are found in the crowded embassy in the capital. If the U.S. is serious about winning the war in Afghanistan through a political solution, Congress should change current law and begin to draft civil servants with the right skill sets and training for national objectives abroad.

In Afghanistan, corruption and incompetency plague the central government. The Afghan government's shortcomings undermine its credibility and support with the populace, fueling insurgent and terrorist propaganda, leading to violence and the need for a continued U.S. military presence. If a "political solution" means winning Afghan public trust in local and central governance at the expense of the Taliban, the U.S. must make it the top priority to train, advise, and equip Afghan officials to build their capacity to govern effectively and honestly.

Currently, undertrained Foreign Service officers and uniformed military personnel are left as the principal advisors to Afghan officials across all sectors of government such as education, transportation, public works, law enforcement, environmental protection, and agriculture. These U.S. personnel are supported by a host of contractors to augment their expertise—but at great taxpayer expense. Nine years on in this conflict, this approach to providing civilian capacity remains at best haphazard and improvised. At worst, it undermines U.S. credibility with the Afghan government and our stated commitment to a "political solution."

The U.S. needs to leverage the taxpayer-funded expertise of civil servants resident in federal departments like Education, Justice, Commerce, Agriculture, Housing and Urban

¹ For President Obama see, "Obama's Address on the War in Afghanistan." *New York Times*. December 1, 2009. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/02/world/asia/02prexy.text.html>>.

For President Bush see, "Full text of President George W. Bush's speech on Iraq." *Telegraph*. September 14, 2007. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1563127/Full-text-of-President-George-W.-Bushs-speech-on-Iraq.html>>.

² "Holbrooke Predicts Nearly 1,000 Civilians in Afghanistan by Early 2010." *Fox News*. November 23, 2009. <<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/11/23/holbrooke-predicts-nearly-civilians-afghanistan-early/>>.

Development, and Health and Human Services. It takes a U.S. Department of Agriculture employee to effectively train his counterpart at the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock, not a diplomat and certainly not a soldier. But the Administration has found it hard enough to cajole Foreign Service officers to deploy to conflict zones,³ how then to bring the full force of the U.S. civil service to the fight?

In an attempt to build *voluntary* capacity for civilian stabilization and advisory operations in pre- or post-conflict zones, the Civilian Response Corps (CRC) was established by Congress in the Supplemental Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2008⁴ and eventually housed in the Office of the Coordinator for Stabilization and Reconstruction at the State Department.⁵ But two years, millions in appropriations, and multiple benefits and incentives for service later, there are just 100 active members and 900 “reservists” in the CRC’s database from a federal government that employs nearly 3 million Americans.⁶

Faced with this dearth of volunteers, the U.S. must consider more robust efforts to generate the skilled manpower needed to meet the mission of building the capacity of the Afghan government. It should consider a draft.

As every American male knows, registration with the U.S. Selective Service at the age of eighteen is required to receive federal financial assistance for college, serve in the U.S. military, or work in U.S. civilian government. The federal requirement is found in Section 3328 of Title 5, U.S. Code and states simply:

An individual who was born after December 31, 1959, and is or was required to register under section 3 of the Military Selective Service Act; and who is not so registered or knowingly and willfully did not so register [...] shall be ineligible for appointment to a position in an Executive agency.⁷

In the absence of adequate volunteers at time of war, this legal requirement provides a massive recruitment pool of U.S. citizens who either felt it their duty to make themselves available for uniformed service to their nation in dangerous places or sought some public benefit from the government and must make themselves available to the needs of the State accordingly.

The same principal can and should be transferred to the civil service. Title 5 of U.S. Code should be amended to require that career U.S. federal employees, as a pre-requisite for non-political appointment into the Senior Executive Services (SES), “register” with the Civilian Response Corps. Non-political employment within or promotion to the SES should be terminated for those who refuse to register or if having registered and called to service refuse to deploy. The legislation should authorize the Director of the Office of Personnel Management and the Secretary of State to jointly prescribe regulations to carry out this mandate. Waivers should be available for those with disabilities or other appropriate medical or family disqualifications. Not

³ “Hunter Spearheads Backlash Against Foreign Service Officers.” *ABC News*. November 1, 2007. <<http://blogs.abcnews.com/politicalradar/2007/11/hunter-spearhea.html>>.

⁴ H.R. 2642. “Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2008.” P.L. 110-252. <<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d110:H.R.2642:>>

⁵ S/CRS Official Website. <<http://www.state.gov/s/crs/>>.

⁶ “Civilian Response Corps Reaches 100 Active Members.” *U.S. Department of State*. April 16, 2010. <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2010/04/140346.htm>>.

⁷ 5 U.S.C. 3328. <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/5/usc_sec_05_00003328----000-.html>.

everyone who registers would deploy within their career. The legislation could be less than two pages in length—far shorter than this article.

After all, those in the career SES are the top-earners in federal government. They hold prominent titles that include words like “Administrator,” “Director,” and even “Secretary.” Is it unreasonable to ask that those interested in the highest levels of management, power, and pay in the civil service make themselves available to the full range of national needs?

Tying the requirement to promotion also takes into account one of the key takeaways from the landmark Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986.⁸ At that time, the authors faced opposition to increased jointness between the military services at the expense of the military departments’ independence. The act was drafted to tie promotion within the military to tours in joint, or “purple,” billets. When the act became law, it ensured that the military services sent their best talent to joint billets, which had not been the case previously. Similarly, tying registration with the Civilian Response Corps to federal promotion ensures that the best of America’s civil servants are available to solve America’s toughest problems.

America needs its best and brightest today to win the wars we’re in. And America needs them on the ground, not in Washington. A small addition to existing law could have tremendous implications for U.S. victory in Afghanistan, regional stability in southwest Asia, as well as rule of law and democracy promotion. That’s something every American should get behind, even public-sector unions.

Michael A. Clauser served as the National Security Legislative Assistant to a senior Republican member of the House Armed Services Committee and House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. He previously served in the Bush Administration in the Pentagon. The views expressed in this commentary are his own and do not reflect that of the United States Government.

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⁸ Locher, James. [Victory on the Potomac: The Goldwater-Nichols Act Unifies the Pentagon](#). Texas A&M University Press. May 14, 2004.