

## **Taking Interagency Stability Operations to a New Level: The Integration of Special Operation Forces and USAID in Afghanistan**

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The publication of FM 3-24 (Counterinsurgency) was a major step in the evolution of military thinking about unconventional warfare. It provides a useful guide to military commanders, soldiers, and civilians as they face a determined enemy interwoven within foreign cultures in Iraq and Afghanistan. It further recognizes that the military cannot counter insurgency alone. This multi-dimensional form of warfare requires the advice, expertise, and resources of civilian agencies that can focus on the political, social, and developmental aspects necessary to undermine support for insurgents.

Despite there being an entire chapter dedicated to the integration of civilian and military activities in the COIN manual, it does not address how to work with and integrate civilian agencies. Different organizational cultures, values, and sensitivities to risk create challenges to integration. Misunderstandings about methods of operation, timelines, and authorities can create friction. Managing expectations and working with idiosyncratic personalities, on both the military and civilian sides, can create frustration. Fully integrating military and civilian agencies down to the tactical level, however, can enhance operational effects and speed the process of creating stability in COIN operations.

In Afghanistan, USAID and Special Operation Forces are working together in a successful interagency model to address the myriad of challenges posed by a growing insurgency. USAID representatives working with SOF are integrating principles of development in creative ways with COIN principles to develop appropriate interventions in select communities. This paper will examine USAID's relationship with CJSOTF-A, describe a successful interagency process for selecting strategic communities, and cover best practices associated with interagency operations. Examples of holistic planning and joint operations in insecure areas will highlight what can be achieved when expertise and combined resources are brought to bear in a COIN environment.

### **USAID and Special Operation Forces (SOF) Working Together in Afghanistan**

For over two years the USAID/Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Team Program has assigned staff to the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force - Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A). The coordination with SOF in Afghanistan is designed to enable USAID

programming to gain access to more remote and insecure areas in order to achieve the U.S. government objectives of stabilization. USAID resources can significantly increase SOF's ability to conduct shaping operations in their areas of operation. Operating outside the reach of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT), SOF elements generally focus on areas of strategic importance to the COIN effort.

USAID has four objectives operating in a COIN environment: (1) strengthen local ties to national government, (2) demonstrate benefits of alliance with the IRoA, (3) reward communities who drive insurgents out of the area, and (4) strengthen local will and ability to resist insurgents. In partnership with CJSOTF-A, USAID representatives are able to access remote and non-permissive areas in order to carry out these objectives.

USAID representatives not only have a budget for work exclusively with CJSOTF-A, the USAID FY 2007 Congressional Supplemental designated \$3.5 million to be used exclusively for programming working in coordination with CJSOTF-A, but they can also access national-level programs. With nearly a one billion dollar annual USAID budget, this represents significant resources for reconstruction and development. SOF elements have the ability to nominate projects to USAID representatives for funding consideration, thus, expanding their access to resources and allowing USAID programs to have a more direct impact on the counterinsurgency. USAID representatives also provide a link for SOF elements to the strategic-level counterinsurgency policy through the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.

USAID's development activities undertaken in a COIN environment take into consideration the nine principles of development.<sup>1</sup> The principles of COIN also play a critical role in determining the appropriate types of engagements and stability activities in communities.<sup>2</sup> Knowing how to combine these principles to achieve desired effects requires a different way of thinking about operations. For example, "ownership," one of the nine principles of development, is probably not the first word the military thinks about when operating in communities. Likewise, "isolating insurgents from the populace" is not a normal consideration for development professionals. Yet the blending of these two mantras is the path to success in a COIN environment. The military must think beyond lethal options and development agencies must take the kid gloves off when dealing with communities pandering to both sides – the insurgents and the government.

Furthermore working in volatile security environments is fairly new ground for development agencies accustomed to centralized programs with national mandates like health, education, infrastructure, and governance. No doctrine exists within civilian agencies describing best practices for partnering with the military and working in insecure areas during a war. Just as the military has adjusted its approach to asymmetrical warfare, USAID needs to create different development methodologies

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<sup>1</sup> USAID Nine Principles of Development: Ownership, Capacity-Building, Sustainability, Selectivity, Assessment, Results, Partnership, Flexibility, and Accountability. See [http://www.usaid.gov/policy/2005\\_nineprinciples.html](http://www.usaid.gov/policy/2005_nineprinciples.html).

<sup>2</sup> FM 3-24, "Counterinsurgency" Dec. 2006, 1-29: Separating insurgents from the populace; connecting the people to their government, etc.

depending on the operational environment.<sup>1</sup> DoD is leaning forward in thinking about the practicalities of successful stabilization efforts but interagency training needs to be institutionalized and improved. The majority of this training happens at the Combat Training Centers or during pre-mission training cycles prior to deploying to conflict zones. On both the military and civilian sides, greater interagency exposure, trainings, and planning both in the schoolhouse and at operational headquarters will further enhance integration efforts.

### **Pre-Operation Planning and Selection of Strategic Communities**

The selection of communities to focus operations and development activities is one of the most essential tasks facing the interagency in a COIN environment. In Afghanistan, the level of poverty and underdevelopment is so severe – particularly in remote and rural areas – that operating without a strategic plan derived from good intelligence and indicators that desired effects can be achieved is like stumbling around a dark room hoping to find your objective. Having an operational focus with realistic objectives and measurable outputs is an essential first step. Good intelligence about the enemy’s disposition, capabilities, and influence with the local population has to be understood and incorporated in an engagement plan. Knowing the tribal structure, on-going conflicts, grievances, and key players is an important piece to learning the human terrain. Finally, recognizing key community indicators of “ripeness” for intervention can not only act as a trigger but also determine the success or failure of the operation.

Just as intelligence drives operations in the military, positive community indicators of “ripeness” should drive decisions to begin development activities in communities in a COIN environment. Indicators are signals that a community is at a “tipping point” where an appropriate engagement, an improvement in the security, or a cluster of projects will provide the impetus to achieve one or more of the COIN objectives. In Afghanistan, this typically leads to a community willing to support the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and turn against the insurgents.

Indicators can vary but the following list provides a general guide:

- Communities take initiative and drive insurgents out of their areas
- The local population, including influential tribal elders, begins to return to their village because of a perceived improvement in the security situation
- Communities increasingly give good information to the Coalition on insurgents, IEDs, or planned future attacks
- Trust and confidence exists between the local population and their security forces
- Tribes in an area feel like they can “control” insurgents or at least that they can stand up to them

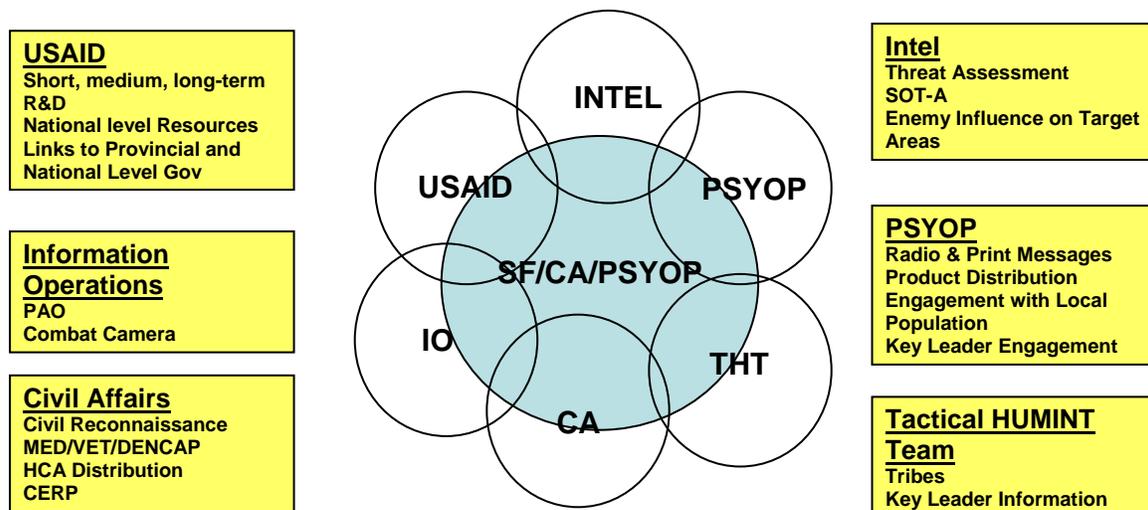
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<sup>1</sup> FM 3-0, “Operations” Feb. 2008, 3-7: Describes four separate elements of full spectrum operations: offensive, defensive, stability, and civil support. One idea would be for USAID to add states dealing with armed insurgencies to USAID’s “Fragile States Strategy” (see USAID’s “Fragile States Strategy” Jan. 2005 [http://www.usaid.gov/policy/2005\\_fragile\\_states\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/policy/2005_fragile_states_strategy.pdf)).

- After successful lethal operations with minimum civilian casualties, communities can be more receptive to working with Coalition and indigenous security forces

Recognizing these indicators and designing an engagement plan is not easy; it requires a solid understanding of the operational environment. Therefore, fully integrating civilians into the intelligence picture is critical. Civilians contribute to this picture by drawing on information the military may not have access such as data about the area held by civilian contractors, NGO's and/or international organizations. Civilians will often have access to databases of historical development activities in select areas. Depending on the area, they may be able to work with partner organizations to send local teams in to conduct assessments and identify key individuals. The diagram below depicts an interagency non-lethal planning model for tactical level operations.

*Non-Lethal Planning Model at the Tactical Level*



This interagency planning model is currently in use in Afghanistan between U.S. SOF and USAID. It is a tactical level plan because of the decentralized nature of SOF operations; Special Forces teams plan the majority of their own operations with minimal guidance from higher headquarters. Operational units are in the center – Special Forces, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operation Teams – and the other elements help paint the operational picture and take part in analysis that drives the engagement plan for the selected community. Sitting around a table with a map of the area that includes a tribal overlay and sharing pertinent information among all participants is the ideal scenario. With the current operational tempo in Afghanistan, it is easy to skip this step due to time constraints or impatience with the process. This level of collaboration and synchronization, however, is necessary and sets the conditions for successful interagency operations at the tactical level. Execution of the engagement strategy is the final piece that determines the ultimate success or failure of the operation.

## **Engaging Strategic Communities to the Counterinsurgency**

While operating with SOF in Afghanistan, USAID representatives are embedded and have the ability to accompany them on all appropriate operations. No private security detail is required by the U.S. Embassy Regional Security Office. This allows civilians to better integrate with the military and have greater access to more remote and insecure areas, often for overnight trips in communities. This level of integration builds rapport between civilians and military and leads to better cooperation.

Once the community engagement begins, the needs of locals are usually the first issues addressed. Military and civilians alike frequently make the mistake of asking “what does your community need?” This line of questioning results in villagers delivering a laundry list of desires, typically a variation of improved security, more wells, better health care, a new mosque, and/or a school, and does not result in a more nuanced understanding of the community. These wish lists may or may not include what the village or tribal elders really care about or what will influence them to change behavior or their allegiances. Foreigners represent money and it is only natural for to ask the wealthy for assistance. For example, if a military unit is asked to fix a well, the decision to do it should not be based on winning the hearts and minds of that family. Military commanders need to be thinking along the lines of whether the intervention helps achieve the principles of COIN. In some cases, community projects funded through CERP or development funds are not necessary to positively influence a community - as they may have grievances against the Coalition or the indigenous forces that can be easily rectified through developing a more sustained and sophisticated engagement.

For example, in Afghanistan CJSOTF-A conducted a tribally focused engagement in the Moqbil tribal area along the border in Paktya Province. After engaging the Moqbil tribal elders, CJSOTF-A learned that they survive through non-interference and non-intervention. The Coalition had arrested one of their leaders who had contacts with insurgents but allegedly was not a member or facilitator. The tribe claimed he was innocent and wanted him released. After an investigation, the claim was verified; the Moqbil elder was returned. They began handing in high-level insurgents and frequently providing information about insurgent movements in the area. As a result, CJSOTF-A started CERP projects focused on the Moqbil tribe and a positive relationship developed helping to transform the environment.

Learning about the communities’ real interests, attitudes, and desires requires a more nuanced approach to engagement. USAID developed the Tactical Conflict Assessment Framework (TCAF) as a tool to understand causes of instability. The questions are geared to help users, whether they be civilian or military, to better understand the operational and cultural environment in their areas of operation. This is being propagated through the military and trained in Combat Training Centers with units preparing to deploy to conflict zones. The questions are open-ended and emphasize the “why” behind responses. Ultimately, however, obtaining quality information from communities requires developing a positive relationship based on trust. This does not happen

overnight. Patience and continual key leader engagements are integral to achieving a deeper level of understanding.

Even without TCAF, planning and rehearsing for key leader engagements is critical. Developing talking points and preparing open-ended questions that probe into the communities' real interests takes practice. The preparation for key leader engagements should be similar to preparing for a job interview. The interviewee will create a list of subjects to cover and develop intelligent questions to ask. In an initial meeting, getting off on the right foot is as important in western cultures as it is in Afghanistan. High rates of illiteracy do not mean locals are not clever. In fact, mannerisms, facial expressions, and attitude are important and not overlooked in Afghanistan. Engaging locals with sincerity and always with an end goal of building a foundation of trust for a productive, long-term relationship will yield the best results.

### **Combining Development Resources: CERP and USAID Funds**

USAID has quick impact funding to support communities in transition or recovering from conflict but the majority of programs are medium to long term in duration. CERP funding is often better suited to respond quickly to community needs but it has limitations. Direct implementation with communities - working through a shura or group of village elders – involves paying locals in an employment generation scheme. This is not commonly done through CERP as these funds are typically channeled through local contractors who bid on the work. USAID does not have this limitation but is not prepared to move quickly in all circumstances. For example, following combat operations to clear insurgents from a village in Farah Province in western Afghanistan, the community asked for a protective wall to channel flood water away from arable fields. USAID was not prepared to move forward without first conducting an analysis of the potential downstream effects of the wall. This study took time to conduct. In the meantime, the military responded to another community request and used CERP funds to hire a contractor to drill wells for the community, thus, achieving more immediate effects.

Combining resources to create a comprehensive engagement plan that draws on the comparative advantages of both agencies can amplify effects. In insecure environments, it is often more appropriate to focus on the “soft” side of development with programs like vocational training, literacy training, small business support, etc. Building vertical structures before villagers are willing to take ownership due to insecurity only creates targets for insurgents. USAID representatives can help the communities take advantage of skills building programs, offsite if necessary, which helps build trust and confidence. Likewise the military, without using CERP funds, can provide transport to villagers requiring medical attention. Repairing cleft palates or arranging for the handicapped to receive new prosthetic limbs can have a tremendous impact on communities.

Building local trust in the indigenous security forces is another critical aspect in a counterinsurgency. Knowing that foreign forces will not stay long-term, the populace wants capable police and a well-trained army they can rely on for protection. Developing

this trust is challenging because indigenous forces often lack proper training and equipment. Corruption is pervasive in Afghanistan, and the Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF) rarely receive monthly salaries on time. In western Uruzgan, however, the SOF overcame these challenges and began to transform the environment.

Beginning with the police, SOF and an embedded international police trainer worked daily with the police chief and his men on improving their training and cohesion as a unit. Frequent flights to the Provincial capital were made to ensure they were paid in full and on time. Likewise, SOF worked with the Afghanistan National Army (ANA) to reinforce their checkpoints. Creating a quick reaction force helped boost the soldiers' confidence – in case of a Taliban attack there was a plan to respond. As local confidence in their security forces improved, people began passing information about insurgent activities. SOF, partnered with the ANA, reacted to this information and began to find and defeat insurgent groups. This further improved the security situation and villagers began returning to the area.

With an improvement in the security conditions and indications of a greater community willingness to work with their security forces, a USAID representative partnered with SOF began a series of small grants directly with the community. Working with the new District Administration to implement cash-for-work road improvement projects, the local villagers began seeing their Government work for them. The projects employed young men, especially youth who could be susceptible to the insurgent's recruiting efforts, to widen and improve existing roads. SOF provided the tools for the project, and USAID paid daily wages.

Using a monitoring and evaluation plan developed by USAID, SOF collected information on the effectiveness of the grants using output and impact indicators. Following a school improvement project, there was a 50% increase in children attending school. While there was only a 10% increase in security incident reporting to indigenous forces, there was over a 10% increase in the population of villages formerly under the control of insurgents. Locals were returning home because of the improvement in security. USAID conducted an emergency response for returning families whose homes were damaged in fighting between the Coalition and insurgents. Purchased in the local bazaar to keep money in the community, flour, cooking oil, and tea were given to select families by the village representatives to assist them as they repaired their homes, planted new crops, and restarted their lives.

These projects, combined with SOF activities to improve the security situation, had resounding effects. An improvement in the community's trust in the ANSF led to a greater openness to the new and unfamiliar District Administration. When they were seen as delivering on services and working for the community – with help behind the scenes from USAID – there was ultimately a reduction in support for insurgent activity and greater stability in the area.

## Effects-Based Operations

Gone are the days of transitioning to non-lethal activities only after the shooting has stopped. In a counterinsurgency, these phases are not sequential. Military units cannot afford to conduct one-dimensional operations focusing on engaging enemy forces. In the age of sophisticated asymmetrical warfare – this method of operation will only achieve limited results and may actually undermine Coalition efforts. By focusing on the principles of counterinsurgency described in the COIN manual, there may be opportunities to support communities as they turn against insurgents. More accurate information on insurgent activities and locations can save lives and facilitate the capture of high-value targets. In some cases, communities may even hand them over.

Understanding the dynamics at work in communities and uncovering the issues that will influence behavior, however, requires a sophisticated community engagement plan. Integrating civilian agencies down to the tactical level and including all available resources (i.e. PSYOP, HUMINT, CA, IO, etc) during planning are quotidian steps to developing a holistic plan. Combining resources from civilian development agencies like USAID with CERP in a complementary way will help maximize effects. Used appropriately, these resources provide incentives to communities and contribute to building confidence in indigenous security forces and their government. Combat operations are an integral aspect of COIN but should not always be a first course of action.

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