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# Development and Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and Pakistan

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper assesses the prospects and challenges for integrating development strategies into counterinsurgency (COIN) efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

### MAIN FINDINGS

- Many of the challenges that confront post-conflict reconstruction processes similarly confound development strategies in COIN efforts, particularly with regard to satisfying the immediate needs of the population, building government capacity, and involving local communities in the development process.
- A successful COIN strategy requires a change in Afghan perceptions of the security situation, the Afghan government, U.S. and NATO/ISAF coalition forces, and the international community.
- Deteriorating security is preventing international organizations and NGOs from accessing many areas in Afghanistan, thereby requiring security forces to distribute aid and run development projects.
- Corruption is one of the greatest obstacles for development programs in Afghanistan because foreign aid is frequently misused and siphoned off for private gain.
- The economic crisis is affecting Pakistan's political stability, which is already tenuous, at the same time as the Pakistani military is intensifying its fight with militant groups in the tribal areas.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- International organizations involved in the design and implementation of development programs must work with the priorities of local communities on a more sustained and regular basis.
- Development strategies must be tailored to the specifics of local needs and circumstances and sensitive to the great variation in geography, economic profile, and security situation among the Afghan provinces and tribal areas of Pakistan.
- Steps must be taken by Afghanistan and the international community to combat corruption that currently weakens development strategies and delegitimizes national and local government.
- The Pakistani military and civilian agencies may face additional challenges to implementing effective development programs as they do not receive the same support and oversight from the U.S. and NATO/ISAF coalition forces.

This paper examines the challenges of integrating development strategies into counterinsurgency (COIN) efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In these two countries such integration will present some of the same challenges that are often in evidence during the implementation of reconstruction programs in post-conflict countries. At the same time, the continuing active insurgency in Afghanistan and in the tribal areas of Pakistan will present additional difficulties in the design and implementation of development strategies. The differences between Afghanistan and Pakistan, however, mean that the challenges of incorporating development strategies into COIN will be distinct in the two contexts. Most significant, whereas the United States has a large military and civilian presence on the ground in Afghanistan and will be, along with its NATO allies, directly involved in the implementation of COIN strategy in that country, in Pakistan the United States will play only an indirect role, leaving both the military and the civilian components of COIN to the Pakistani government and the Pakistani army.

This essay is organized as follows. The first section examines general challenges of integrating development strategies into COIN. Next, the essay focuses on Afghan perceptions of the political situation in their country and the impact of these perceptions on COIN's success. The third and fourth sections then examine the key challenges of integrating development strategies into COIN in Afghanistan, and in particular highlight the negative impact of corruption on development efforts. The fifth section examines the challenges of integrating development into COIN in Pakistan. The concluding section offers policy recommendations.

## General Challenges to Integrating Development Strategies into COIN

The war in Afghanistan and the developments in Pakistan are inextricably linked. In both countries, there is currently a new emphasis on the importance of implementing a COIN approach that is population-centric and focused on diplomacy, development, and defense. For this approach to succeed, however, a number of issues will need to be addressed with respect to integrating development strategies into COIN efforts in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Effective integration of development strategies into COIN efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan presents a number of challenges. Although the challenges in the two countries are different, there are a number of key similarities. In fact, some of these challenges are common to most cases of post-conflict reconstruction.

### *Negotiating Tensions in the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Process*

One of the main challenges concerns resolving the tensions that tend to be present in post-conflict environments. Among the most important of these is the urgency of satisfying the immediate needs of a population that lacks many basic necessities while building local government capacity and legitimacy. The needs and expectations of the population to see quick improvement in living conditions are great. Yet, local government tends to lack the capacity to meet these needs. It is therefore tempting to rely on international donor agencies to quickly deliver the services the public expects. This approach, although likely to improve conditions on the ground because it bypasses local government institutions, may, however, undermine the legitimacy and capacity-building of the local government, which is key to the long-term sustainability of development efforts.

As this highlights, there is also a tension between what is effective in the short run and what is efficient over the long term. Any post-conflict reconstruction process is a balancing act between providing security, humanitarian relief, and physical infrastructure, on the one hand, and addressing longer-term development objectives, on the other.

There is often a tension between the window of opportunity that the end of a conflict provides for implementing political and economic reforms with international donor assistance and the absorptive capacity of the government. The weakness of existing institutions means that the capacity of local government is often limited and, therefore, too much foreign assistance at once may overwhelm the system and not be utilized effectively.

Finally, in designing development strategies there is likely to be in particular tension between the need to provide quick impact development projects that can “win the hearts and minds” of the population and the need to craft long-term, sustainable development. In the case of Afghanistan, the tension between the lack of government capacity to deliver services and the need to build that capacity while ensuring that the population’s basic needs are met is likely to loom large. As the following sections of the paper will highlight, however, the continuing insurgency and the difficult security situations in Afghanistan and in the tribal areas of Pakistan mean that the challenges of designing and implementing development programs will be different in those countries than in countries where armed hostilities have ceased.

In both Afghanistan and Pakistan, the insurgency has not yet been defeated. Nonetheless, many of the tensions that post-conflict countries face are likely to be present in both of these countries despite the persistence of conflict; in fact, the tensions may well be felt even more acutely.

### *Involving Local Communities in Development Projects*

A key challenge that integrating development strategies into COIN will face in both Afghanistan and Pakistan is how best to involve local communities in the design and implementation of the development projects. The international donor and development community has long recognized that local capacity-building and local ownership of development efforts is key to the successful implementation and sustainability of development programs. This is particularly true of post-conflict reconstruction efforts in which rebuilding of the physical infrastructure is but one component of the task and where reestablishing human capital and restoring destroyed communal relations are also essential to the long-term success of such programs. The same is true in an environment where conflict has not yet ended.

Yet translating this knowledge into effective programming in post-conflict reconstruction as well as during COIN operations has frequently not met expectations of the local communities. All too often, reconstruction, reconciliation, and peace-building projects have been designed and implemented by international donors in ways that reflect their priorities, preferences, and values rather than those of the local communities. As a consequence, local communities do not always feel that they have been sufficiently consulted during the process of design and implementation. Without such consultations and community input, many projects, however well-intentioned, remain alien and disconnected from the needs and realities of ordinary people.

The perceptions of the Afghan public, which will be examined in detail below, certainly indicate that the manner in which development assistance has been provided, allocated, and utilized has left a majority of Afghans feeling increasingly dissatisfied with the progress the country is making, with the international community that is providing that assistance, and with the Afghan

government, which is a partner in implementing these development programs. A successful integration of development strategies into COIN will need to address how to change Afghan perceptions. To do so, the way development assistance is provided and how Afghans are brought into the process will require attention.

## Changing Afghan Perceptions: A Key Requirement for COIN Success

Over the last two years, the security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated significantly, with rising numbers of coalition and Afghan casualties. The success of COIN strategy in Afghanistan largely depends on changing popular perceptions of the security situation, of the Afghan government; of the United States, NATO, and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF); and of the international community in general. Changing these increasingly negative perceptions among the Afghan population is necessary because of COIN's focus on "winning the hearts and minds" of Afghans. In other words, a key to the success of COIN is convincing the public that it will benefit more from supporting the government than from supporting the insurgents, and that it is the government rather than the insurgents that offers hope for a better future. Insurgents are also aware that the perceptions of the Afghan public will affect the course of the conflict and thus exploit and build upon people's views of the government's ineffectiveness and low legitimacy. Ensuring delivery of basic services and employment prospects will therefore be crucial to convincing Afghans of the tangible benefits of supporting the government.

The decline in goodwill among Afghans toward the international community has been startling. In 2005, 87% of Afghans viewed the U.S.-led ouster of the Taliban positively, and only 9% held negative views. By February 2009, positive views had declined to 69% while negative views climbed to 24%. Similarly, Afghan perceptions of the United States have become less favorable, declining from 83% in 2005 to 47% in 2009. Unfavorable views, which in 2005 were held by only 14% of the Afghan public, increased to 52% in 2009.<sup>1</sup> Other polls have found even fewer Afghans holding positive views of the performance of the United States.<sup>2</sup> These declining positive perceptions of the United States and NATO/ISAF are translating into lack of Afghan support for increasing troop levels. Only 18% would like to see more coalition troops, whereas 44% would like to see a reduction in the troop levels. In particular, civilian casualties resulting from air strikes have generated criticism from Afghans.<sup>3</sup>

Although positive perceptions of the United States and the international community have declined, this has not, however, translated into an overall increase in Afghan support for the Taliban. Worrisome nonetheless, from the perspective of successfully pursuing COIN, is that changes in the public's support for the Taliban are not uniformly distributed across the country. Although support for the Taliban has not nationally increased significantly, in the southwestern parts of the country, where the insurgency is strongest, support for the Taliban has been growing.

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Langer, "Afghanistan: Where Things Stand," Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), February 11, 2009, <http://csis.org/multimedia/audio-afghanistan-where-things-stand>.

<sup>2</sup> A February 9, 2009, poll by ABC, the BBC, and ARD found that "the number who say the United States has performed well in Afghanistan has" declined from 68% in 2005 to 32% in 2009. Just 37% of Afghans now say most people in their area support Western forces, compared to 67% in 2006. As well, 25% percent now say that attacks on U.S. or NATO/ISAF forces can be justified, compared to 13% in 2006. See Jill McGivering, "Afghan People 'Losing Confidence,'" *BBC News*, February 9, 2009, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7872353.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7872353.stm).

<sup>3</sup> Langer, "Afghanistan: Where Things Stand."