

# Campaign Assessment in Counterinsurgency: Reinventing the Wheel

A Monograph

by

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## Abstract

Campaign Assessment in Counterinsurgency: Reinventing the Wheel, by MAJ James C. Bithorn, United State Army, 40 pages.

Strategic and political leaders have determined that the US and ISAF campaign assessments were neither useful nor accurate. The DOD 1230 biannual report titled the *Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan* provides comprehensive information to strategic and political leaders regarding the progress of the United States' strategy in Afghanistan. The report, however, has largely provided indicators of progress based off a single variable—enemy initiated ambushes. As attention drew to the failure of ISAF to provide accurate reporting, a degree of mistrust grew between strategic and political leaders and the military leaders in Afghanistan. In turn, strategic leaders made only partially informed decisions that did not reflect accurately the progress on the ground. The July 2013 DOD 1230 report touted a change in metrics, placing a greater emphasis on variables such as security force development and economic growth. The announcement of new metrics raised an obvious question, were the new measures of performance in Afghanistan actually better, and why had change taken so long?

Answering this research question required four steps. First, it was necessary to determine the importance of assessments and measures of performance in the development of strategy in the COIN environment. Second, it was necessary to examine how ISAF initially developed its assessment plan. Next, it was necessary to examine a historical instance of campaign assessments in COIN. The US and MACV in Vietnam experienced similar complications throughout the Vietnam War. Initially accused of intentionally bloating casualty figures, MACV made a concentrated effort to develop a more accurate assessment model to inform progress. The improved model, the Hamlet Evaluation System, analyzed a host of variables across South Vietnam to assess progress over time. Lastly, by comparing the efforts in Vietnam with those in Afghanistan it was possible to identify assessment concepts that would have been applicable in Afghanistan.

The evidence ultimately shows that as the US and ISAF sought to develop assessment measures, they replicated the errors made in Vietnam. Additionally, despite advances in technology, ISAF's assessment plan did not reach the level of sophistication that MACV achieved in Vietnam. Although the HES was criticized during the Vietnam War, the iterative attempts by MACV to improve its assessment plan provided useful lessons for the US and ISAF in Afghanistan.

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## Acronyms

AAG	Afghanistan Assessment Group
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
CACD	Commander's Appreciation and Campaign Design
CIDNE	Combined Information Data Network Exchange
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
CTC-A	COIN Training Center-Afghanistan
DSA	District Security Advisor
DSF	District Stability Framework
EIA	Enemy Initiated Ambush
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
HES	Hamlet Evaluation System
ICAF	Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework
IJC	ISAF Joint Command
ISAF-A	International Security Assistance Force-Afghanistan
MACV	Military Assistance Command Vietnam
MOE	Measure of Effectiveness
MOP	Measure of Performance
MPICE	Measuring Progress in Conflict Environments
NSAM	National Security Assistance Memorandum
NSS	National Security Strategy
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
PACES	Pacification Evaluation System
SAIFED	Southeast Asia Intelligence and Force Effectiveness Division
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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## Introduction

Going forward, we will not blindly stay the course. Instead, we will set clear metrics to measure progress and hold ourselves accountable. We'll consistently assess our efforts to train Afghan security forces and our progress in combating insurgents. We will measure the growth of Afghanistan's economy, and its illicit narcotics production. And we will review whether we are using the right tools and tactics to make progress towards accomplishing our goals.

— President Barack Obama, *On a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan*

The Department of Defense (DOD) 1230 Report, *Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan* provides comprehensive information to strategic and political leaders regarding the progress of the United States' strategy in Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> Since 2008, every six months the DOD prepares and submits the report to the Senate and the House of Representatives. When preparing this report, the DOD receives input from the Secretary of State, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, the Director of National Intelligence, the Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development.<sup>2</sup> The July 2013 edition of the DOD 1230 Report included a section titled, "A Note on Metrics." The note commented on the overreliance on Enemy Initiated Ambushes (EIAs) as the sole measure of progress, which marked DOD's recognition that the reliance on that one measure to assess progress was not useful.<sup>3</sup> "As the conflict has evolved, it has become clear that a tally of EIAs is not now, nor was it ever, the most complete measure of the campaign's progress."<sup>4</sup> This DOD revelation occurred twelve years into US and International Security Assistance Force–Afghanistan (ISAF-A) operations in Afghanistan. To rectify this

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Defense, *DOD 1230: Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan* Report to Congress (Washington, DC: 2012), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

problem, the July 2013 report stated that future reports would place a greater emphasis on the measurement of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) development along with economic development and improvements in governance.<sup>5</sup> However, despite DOD's delay in providing useful measures, others recognized the need before 2013. Military leaders and strategic commentators noted DOD's failure to report on more holistic performance measures years earlier. Unlike the US in Iraq and largely due to requests made by media outlets and political commentators, senior military officers did not classify all the assessment material, which in turn has made this research possible.<sup>6</sup> However, it is reasonable to conclude that classified information related to assessments exists, but will be unavailable for some time. As such, this research is limited to the released, unclassified data on assessments in Afghanistan.

Upon assuming command of ISAF in 2009, General Stanley McChrystal published his "Commander's Initial Assessment," which reported on the state of operations in Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup> Within Section V of the assessment, McChrystal pointed to the absence of useful metrics and that ". . . [ISAF] must develop effective assessment architectures . . . to measure the effects of the strategy, assess progress toward key objectives, and make necessary adjustments."<sup>8</sup> In 2010, the senior intelligence officer in Afghanistan, Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, assessed the US intelligence community's performance in Afghanistan. His report, *Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan* painted a bleak picture of the US intelligence community in Afghanistan. The report stated that intelligence organizations were overly focused

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<sup>5</sup> Department of Defense, *DOD 1230: Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan* (July 2013), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Ben Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: National Defense Research Institute, 2012), 206.

<sup>7</sup> William J. Gregor, "Military Planning Systems and Stability Operations," *PRISM Magazine*, no. 3 (June 2010), 100.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

on the threat, isolated from organizations outside of the intelligence community, and not structured to distill relevant information from the complex Afghan environment.<sup>9</sup> Also in 2010, well-known sociologist Amitai Etzioni reviewed General David Petraeus' five metrics employed in Afghanistan, formally known as measures of effectiveness (MOE) or measures of performance (MOP). In his September 2010 article, "Beware of Generals Carrying Metrics," Etzioni questioned the correlation between the metrics employed and the prescribed strategic and operational objectives in Afghanistan. He further observed that the measures used strongly likened themselves to the body counts used in Vietnam prior to the establishment of the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES).<sup>10</sup> Etzioni observed that security metrics used at the time, primarily enemy-initiated ambushes, were analogous to those measures used early on in Vietnam.<sup>11</sup> Finally, a 2013 Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) report, *The Afghan War in 2013, Meeting the Challenges of Transition* stated, "ISAF has reported on carefully selected indicators of tactical progress—the kinetics—in a war that is actually a war of political attrition."<sup>12</sup> The amount of attention paid to ISAF's performance measures by political commentators and organizations indicates that many do not find the metrics useful and they doubt the accuracy of the reports.

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<sup>9</sup> Michael T. Flynn, Matthew Pottinger, and Paul D. Batchelor, *Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: New American Century, 2010), 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> Amitai Etzioni, "Beware of Generals Carrying Metrics," *Huffington Post*, September 30, 2010, accessed October 12, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amitai-etzioni/beware-of-generals-carryi\\_b\\_745343.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amitai-etzioni/beware-of-generals-carryi_b_745343.html).

<sup>11</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, Bryan Gold, and Ashley Hess, *The Afghan War in 2013: Meeting the Challenges of Transition*, Vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2013), 14.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

The purpose of campaign assessments is to inform strategic and political leaders. As such, policy makers and operational and tactical commanders require measures that clearly indicate that the actions taken are succeeding.<sup>13</sup> Beginning in 2013, ISAF claimed it had developed a new approach to security metrics drawn from a balance of several environmental factors. The implementation of a new approach leads to an obvious question “Has the development of new measures of performance in Afghanistan actually improved assessments?”

Answering this research question required four steps. First, it was necessary to determine the importance of assessments and measures of performance in the development of strategy in the Counterinsurgency (COIN) environment. Determining the importance of assessments revealed what performance measures and assessments ought to do, and what information they provide decision makers. Additionally, investigating the use of assessments in strategy development made clear how the strategy was undermined when due diligence was not applied to the development of performance measures.

Second, it was necessary to examine how ISAF initially developed its assessment plan. This step included a review of the resources that were available to guide the development of performance measures and their usefulness. Because reports, such as the DOD 1230, inform strategic leaders, it was also essential to understand their reactions to the initial measures, and to determine whether they considered the measures useful for decision-making.

Third, Etzioni suggested there were valuable lessons available by investigating the Vietnam War strategy assessments. History revealed that the pacification effort in Vietnam experimented with a variety of metrics to assess campaign progress. Analysts lambasted the use of enemy body counts to measure effectiveness. That critique ultimately led to the creation of the

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<sup>13</sup> Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*, 52.

Hamlet Evaluation System (HES), a system that focused on guerilla activity, local economic freedom, and attitudinal assessments within the various South Vietnamese hamlets.<sup>14</sup> The efforts by MACV in Vietnam provide a useful basis for assessing the development of performance measures by ISAF in Afghanistan.

Fourth, by comparing the efforts in Vietnam with those in Afghanistan it was possible to identify assessment concepts that would have been applicable in Afghanistan. The evidence ultimately shows that as the US and ISAF sought to develop assessment measures, they replicated the errors made in Vietnam. Additionally, despite advances in technology, ISAF's assessment plan did not reach the level of sophistication that MACV achieved in Vietnam. Although the HES was criticized during the Vietnam War, the iterative attempts by MACV to improve its assessment plan provided useful lessons for the US and ISAF in Afghanistan.

### **Campaign Assessment and Measures**

A campaign assessment serves two purposes. One, it informs policymakers and, two it shapes decisions made by operational headquarters. To meet the two assessment goals often requires two separate reports—one tailored for policy makers, “up or out,” and another for operational units, “down and in.”<sup>15</sup> Regardless of the intended audience, the assessment should inform decisions on resource allocation, initiatives, and changes to strategy. A useful assessment helps a military organization to understand how well it has performed its mission, both outputs and achievements.<sup>16</sup> Several military publications describe and define assessments. *The United*

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<sup>14</sup> Historical Branch, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, In *Command History, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, 1969 Vol. 1* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1975), 13.

<sup>15</sup> Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*, 32.

<sup>16</sup> Boby Claflin, Dave Sanders, and Greg Boylan, *Improving Analytical Support to the Warfighter: Campaign Assessments, Operational Analysis, and Data Management* (Alexandria, VA: Military Operations Research Society, 2010), 15.

*States Army Commander's Appreciation and Campaign Design* (CACD) describes assessment as an opportunity to learn, and lists the five outcomes from a well-informed assessment. The publication further asserts that the Army has failed to put sufficient effort into achieving the final benefits of information on.

- How to execute the planned course of action for a specific operation;
- Whether another course of action needs to be adopted;
- Whether the operational design based on the problem frame is producing results;
- Whether the problem framing needs adjusting; and whether the learning mechanisms of the organization are tuned to the particular operational problem.<sup>17</sup>

The development of useful assessments in COIN has proven an elusive goal. One of the more difficult aspects of assessment is the selection of measures and success criteria to inform the overall assessment. As the CACD has implied, there is a dearth of military literature on the selection of performance measures. In the absence of military doctrine, complexity theory provides a substitute with which understand the importance of performance measures.

According to Robert Axelrod's *Harnessing Complexity*, the logic behind success criteria is simple. If an agent cannot determine whether a strategy is succeeding or failing, then how does an agent determine what should be done? Assessment in complex environments is not easy, and often leads to the identification of more than one criterion to assess results. Additionally, the measures may require adjustment over time as agents react to the measures.<sup>18</sup>

Attributing success or failure incorrectly easily leads to a misconstrued strategy. The variables used as strategy performance measures are critical for making a useful assessment and ultimately for making correct decisions. Although measures may require adjustment over time, it is also important to understand that when performance measures are radically changed it becomes

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<sup>17</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, *TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5-500: Commander's Appreciation and Campaign Design* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008), 18.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Axelrod and Michael D. Cohen, *Harnessing Complexity: Organizational Implications of a Scientific Frontier* (New York: Simeon & Schuster, 2000), 124-125.

more difficult to observe long-term.<sup>19</sup> This highlights the importance of longitudinal data, or performance measures that reflect a strategy's success or failure over significant periods.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, it is important to define consistent variables and performance measures at the start of a campaign rather than in the midst of operations.

To understand the value of assessments to a campaign strategy, it is important to understand the impact of performance measures on assessments. The selection of performance measures requires deliberate and careful consideration as they inform an assessment by serving as a conduit of information for decision-makers. The performance measures developed by the US and ISAF in Afghanistan were solely focused on lethal events and did not accurately inform campaign progress. Several factors such as a lack of guiding doctrine, unclear strategic guidance, and a convoluted headquarters contributed to the problem. The following section will explore how the US and ISAF developed a campaign assessment plan and provide context for the failure to develop useful performance measures.

### **Uncertainty in Progress**

#### Afghanistan and Irrelevant Metrics

Given the importance of assessment criteria for determining progress during a counterinsurgency operation, the lack of effort to assess progress in Afghanistan until 2008 seems strange.<sup>21</sup> Following relative success against Taliban forces in the Hindu Kush Mountains of Afghanistan in 2002, the US failed to define the next or final objective. President George W. Bush provided a vision of the future in a speech at the Virginia Military Institute. Bush said, "We

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<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Reilly, *Operational Design: Distilling Clarity from Complexity for Decisive Action* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 2012), 114-115.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

will stay until the mission is done. We know that true peace will only be achieved when we give the Afghan people the means to achieve their own aspirations.”<sup>22</sup> The statement left the US mission in Afghanistan ambiguous and failed to define the enemy precisely. When the priority of effort shifted to Iraq in 2003 Afghanistan became an afterthought in the minds of strategic policy makers. However, by 2008 a resurgent Taliban and hosts of other insurgent groups re-infiltrated from safe havens in Pakistan and resumed the offensive. In the summer of 2008, hostile acts spiked up to four hundred per week, and prompted senior leaders to pay attention.<sup>23</sup> With Iraq finally winding down, ISAF commander General David McKiernan made a request for an additional 30,000 troops. Eventually, and then only under the command of another ISAF commander, Obama partially filled that request. As it became clear that Afghanistan was to become a greater priority, serious efforts began to improve campaign planning and assessment. Counterinsurgency became the expected approach in Afghanistan once Obama appointed General Stanley McChrystal to lead ISAF in 2009. The hope was to replicate the type of success seen in Iraq, an outcome publically attributed to David Petraeus.<sup>24</sup>

Making a comparison between metrics used to assess success in Vietnam and Afghanistan is not easy. Both wars spanned more than a decade and the measures changed. Reviewing the early years in Afghanistan was not productive because an assessment plan was not in place. However, in 2008, when the surge in Afghanistan was in the offering there was a serious concern for sound assessment and useful metric. Thus, any evaluation of the development of

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<sup>22</sup> Daniel Bolger, *Why We Lost: A General's Inside Account of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars* (New York: Harcourt Publishing Company, 2014), 136.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

assessment measures needed to start at 2008 and begin by examining the doctrinal guidance available at that time.

In 2005, FM 5-0 *Army Planning and Orders Production*<sup>25</sup> provided detailed guidance on military planning. It emphasized a planning concept known as the Operations Process.<sup>26</sup> The Operations Process directs commanders to understand, visualize, describe, and direct while leading and assessing. The process also emphasized cyclical planning during which assessment was a primary component throughout to feed the next evolution of the plan.<sup>27</sup> Although the distribution of effort shifts during the operations process, assessment variables must be consistent throughout the planning effort, (see figure 1).

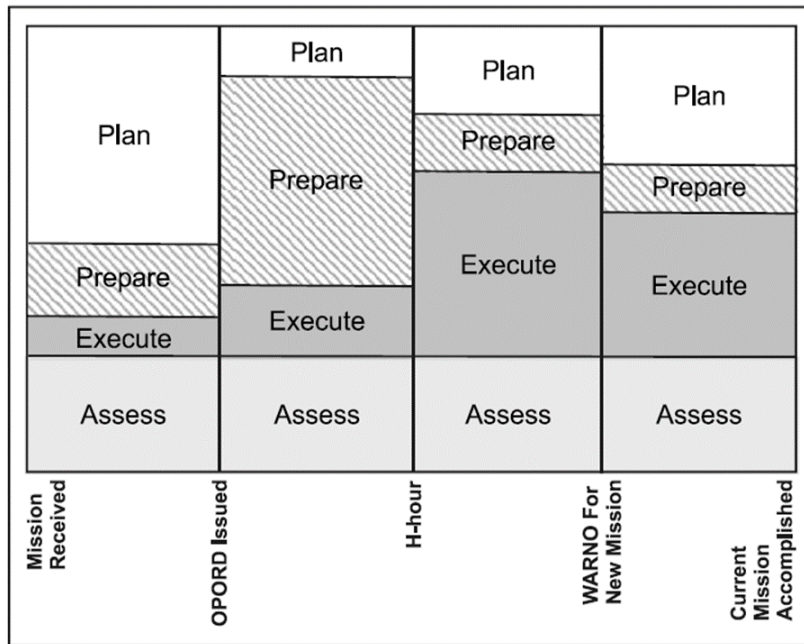


Figure 1: FM 5-0: Distribution of Operations Process Activities

Source: FM 5-0, *Army Planning and Orders Production* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, Jan 2005), 1-10.

<sup>25</sup> Field Manual (FM) 5-0, *Army Planning and Orders Production* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2005), 1.

<sup>26</sup> FM 5-0, 1-1.

<sup>27</sup> FM 5-0, 1-10.

Despite the claim that assessment is critical to the operations process, FM 5-0 does not expand on the assessment process. The manual loosely describes what questions assessments should be answering, but provides no framework for building an assessment plan. Absent useful information regarding assessment in FM 5-0, a military planner might logically consult doctrinal manuals for specific types of military operations to uncover a doctrinal framework. In this case, the doctrine consulted was counterinsurgency doctrine.

In 2006, FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* was the Army's capstone document for understanding and executing counterinsurgency operations. Field Manual 3-24 was the Army's recognition that counterinsurgency warfare differed from the conventional warfare approach of fire and maneuver and required a novel approach.<sup>28</sup> Field Manual 3-24 sought to inform military planners about insurgency and provide an approach for conducting counterinsurgency operations.<sup>29</sup> Although the original publication addressed an aspect of warfare that had gone unguided for some time, its section on assessments was deficient.<sup>30</sup> The manual dedicated a total of three pages and one table to the development and implementation of measurement criteria.<sup>31</sup> Although the publication stated, "subjective assessment at all levels is essential to understand the diverse and complex nature of COIN operations," the manual did not provide any additional comments. The manual provided no examples of metrics, did not discuss common pitfalls, and gave no instructions for developing metrics.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the table providing (see figure 2) an example of progress indicators presented acts of violence as the first indicator,

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<sup>28</sup> Richard H. Schultz and Andrea J. Dew, "Counterinsurgency by the Book," *New York Times* (August 7, 2006), accessed on October 24, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/07/opinion/07shultz.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/07/opinion/07shultz.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

<sup>29</sup> Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), 1.

<sup>30</sup> Schultz and Dew, "Counterinsurgency by the Book."

<sup>31</sup> FM 3-24, 5-26 to 5-28.

<sup>32</sup> FM 3-24, 5-26.

followed by population centric indicators. That might have led the planners to conclude that indicators of violence took precedence over population centric indicators.

The Army and the joint force used the 2006 FM 3-24 until the culmination of Operation Iraqi Freedom/New Dawn and applied it in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom. As such, it served as the common reference for counterinsurgency operations.

- **Acts of violence** (numbers of attacks, friendly/host-nation casualties).
- **Dislocated civilians.** The number, population, and demographics of dislocated civilian camps or the lack thereof are a resultant indicator of overall security and stability. A drop in the number of people in the camps indicates an increasing return to normalcy. People and families exiled from or fleeing their homes and property and people returning to them are measurable and revealing.<sup>1</sup>
- **Human movement and religious attendance.** In societies where the culture is dominated by religion, activities related to the predominant faith may indicate the ease of movement and confidence in security, people's use of free will and volition, and the presence of freedom of religion. Possible indicators include the following:
  - Flow of religious pilgrims or lack thereof.
  - Development and active use of places of worship.
  - Number of temples and churches closed by a government.
- **Presence and activity of small- and medium-sized businesses.** When danger or insecure conditions exist, these businesses close. Patrols can report on the number of businesses that are open and how many customers they have. Tax collections may indicate the overall amount of sales activity.
- **Level of agricultural activity.**
  - Is a region or nation self-sustaining, or must life-support type foodstuffs be imported?
  - How many acres are in cultivation? Are the fields well maintained and watered?
  - Are agricultural goods getting to market? Has the annual need increased or decreased?
- **Presence or absence of associations.** The formation and presence of multiple political parties indicates more involvement of the people in government. Meetings of independent professional associations demonstrate the viability of the middle class and professions. Trade union activity indicates worker involvement in the economy and politics.
- **Participation in elections,** especially when insurgents publicly threaten violence against participants.
- **Government services available.** Examples include the following:
  - Police stations operational and police officers present throughout the area.
  - Clinics and hospitals in full operation, and whether new facilities sponsored by the private sector are open and operational.
  - Schools and universities open and functioning.
- **Freedom of movement of people, goods, and communications.** This is a classic measure to determine if an insurgency has denied areas in the physical, electronic, or print domains.
- **Tax Revenue.** If people are paying taxes, this can be an indicator of host-nation government influence and subsequent civil stability.
- **Industry exports.**
- **Employment/unemployment rate.**
- **Availability of electricity.**
- **Specific attacks on infrastructure.**

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<sup>1</sup> *Dislocated civilian* is a broad term that includes a displaced person, an evacuee, an expellee, an internally displaced person, a migrant, a refugee, or a stateless person (JP 1-02). Dislocated civilians are a product of the deliberate violence associated with insurgencies and their counteraction. (See FM 3-05.40/MCRP 3-33.1A for additional information on dislocated civilians.)

Figure 2: FM 3-24: Example Progress Indicators

Source: Headquarters, FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, Dec 2006), 5-26 to 5-28.

Despite the low level of detail found in both FM 5-0 and FM 3-24, the definitions of the measure of effectiveness (MOE) and measure of performance (MOP) published in Joint Publication 1-02 provide planners a doctrinal starting point for designing an assessment model.

Joint Publication 1-02 defines the MOE as “a criterion used to assess changes in systems behavior, capability, or the operational environment that is tied to measuring the attainment of an end state, achievement of an objective, or creation of an effect.”<sup>33</sup> The same publication defines MOP as “a criterion used to measure friendly actions that is tied to measuring task accomplishment.”<sup>34</sup> In nonprofessional terms, the MOE answers the question, are we doing the right things, while the MOP asks the question, are we doing things right? Although the terms MOEs and MOP’s suggest a very loose framework to planners looking to build an assessment model, they do nothing more than hint at what is required in COIN campaign assessment.

Because the 2006 version of FM 3-24 provided no instructions for defining metrics, staff members and policy makers attempted to develop a methodology through trial and failure. The efforts resulted in the collection of an overwhelming amount of data. Without a tested and proven methodology, the data sorted and scored became lost in an anarchic system. The poor data management largely contributed to a distorted picture of progress.<sup>35</sup> Upon assuming command of ISAF, McChrystal established two separate headquarters to collect and analyze data, the ISAF Afghan Assessment Group (AAG) and the ISAF Joint Command (IJC) Information Dominance Center.<sup>36</sup> Their purpose was to create meaningful and relevant security metrics. A lack of complete and accurate data hampered both headquarters’ efforts and produced a convoluted picture of security progress in Afghanistan. Despite major technological advances, data collection and management problems in Afghanistan remained persistent and slow to change.

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<sup>33</sup> Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), 163.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 208-209.

<sup>36</sup> Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*, 208.

Multiple headquarters in Afghanistan collect and upload Significant Activity (SIGACT) reports to a central database known as the Combined Information Data Network Exchange (CIDNE).<sup>37</sup> Senior staff members then analyze the CIDNE database to identify indicators of progress. Although the data draws from multiple sources, it lacks context and requires further scrutiny to determine security progress. Information uploaded to CIDNE normally provides raw data without accompanying narrative or context, leaving interpretation to the imagination of the staff officer. As such, tracking SIGACT data without the requisite context only leads to the further diluted picture of progress.

The presence or absence of violence, without context and other variables, is not a meaningful metric for determining security progress. A common conceptual issue for SIGACTs was the ability to distinguish between insurgency-related violence and other acts of violence, such as ethnic or tribal violence.<sup>38</sup> Without discriminating between the types of violence, it is nearly impossible to determine a rise or fall in insurgent violence in Afghanistan at any given time. Examples of misallocation include intimidation and violence against civilians, inter and intra tribal violence, crime, etc. Additionally, the introduction of a unit into a new area can also produce a significant rise in SIGACT related violence. As David Kilcullen points out, “violence tends to be high in contested areas and low in government-controlled areas.”<sup>39</sup> This implies that the insertion of an ISAF unit or ANSF into a previously unoccupied area will produce a spike in violence. This concept also applies in an insurgent controlled area. “But it is also low in enemy controlled areas, so that a low level of violence indicates that *someone* is fully in control of a district, but does not tell us who.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, the absence of SIGACTs in an area is not truly

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<sup>37</sup> Connable, 213.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>39</sup> David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 70.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

representative of security, and without the proper analysis and context, does not provide a meaningful metric.

The AAG, one of the two headquarters that McChrystal established, relied heavily upon the data reported in CIDNE to produce reports on security progress. Those reports then fueled reports to strategic and political leaders, such as the DOD 1230 report. The information presented to strategic decision makers focused solely on enemy activity, and, thereby, slanted the picture of relative success in Afghanistan far from reality.<sup>41</sup> According to a 2013 Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) report, *The Afghan War in 2013, Meeting the Challenges of Transition*, ISAF and the US reported on only the “positive” trends in the fight against the insurgents.<sup>42</sup> The use of carefully selected indicators that painted the picture of tactical progress severely tainted the unclassified picture of the war in Afghanistan after 2009. That ISAF chose to highlight the kinetics, in particular, EIAs to inform their measures of effectiveness, proved a deadly practice in a war of political attrition.<sup>43</sup> Further, ISAF failed to develop metrics that demonstrated any tactical progress at the highpoint in ISAF deployments. This slanted picture led strategic leaders to believe ISAF had made significant progress, which drove policy decisions on troop timelines. As a result, an insurgent expectation of withdrawal by 2014 negatively affects progress towards stability and security.

The use of EIAs from 2009-2012 as a reportable metric showed the most favorable set of statistical trends. However, the metric is devoid of military or political meaning.<sup>44</sup> The continued use of EIAs represent a kinetic focus on tactical victories in regular combat that characterized a

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<sup>41</sup> Cordesman, Gold, and Hess, *The Afghan War in 2013: Meeting the Challenges of Transition* Vol. 1, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>44</sup> Cordesman, Gold, and Hess, *The Afghan War in 2013: Meeting the Challenges of Transition* Vol. 1, 14.

great deal of US and ISAF reporting before the insurgency reached the crisis level in 2008, and in ways, strikingly similar to pre-Tet assessments in Vietnam. The EIA metric focuses attention on the areas where US, ISAF, and the best ANA forces have a decisive tactical advantage. This focus on EIAs ignores the fact that militant groups such as the Taliban are fighting a political war of attrition, and demonstrates that winning tactical clashes does not defeat an insurgency. As a result, it becomes remarkably difficult to assess any ISAF success in light of the challenges that the ANSF face.

Metrics and data collected in a COIN environment constitute a large portion of a strategic leader's decision support repertoire. When the data is misused to support a public relations narrative rather than assess the relative success or failure of a campaign's approach, the trustworthiness of data and the reporting becomes suspect and is questioned. The DOD 1230 report to Congress, *the Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, largely relies upon the increase or decrease in EIAs to support an assessment of the security situation. The following observation from the DOD 1230 report released in December 2012 coincides with completion of the US and ISAF troop surge in Afghanistan.

“The improvement in the security of the populated areas of Afghanistan was the most significant security-related development of the reporting period. Security dramatically improved in most of Afghanistan's five most populous districts, with EIAs in the first nine months of 2012 compared to the same period in 2011 dropping 22 percent in Kabul, 62 percent in Kandahar, 13 percent in Herat, 88 percent in Mezar-e-Sharif, and rising 2 percent in Kunduz.<sup>2</sup> In many of the most contested areas of the country, insurgent attacks are becoming more isolated, and are occurring further away from population centers. The majority of Afghanistan's 405 districts now experience very low levels of EIAs; 80 percent of attacks occur in districts encompassing only 20 percent of the population, and nearly one half of all attacks country-wide occur in just 17 districts – that contain only five percent of the population. The Taliban's ability to attack the people of Afghanistan has been diminished, particularly in Kandahar, the operational and ideological base of the Taliban.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Department of Defense, *DOD 1230, Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, 3.

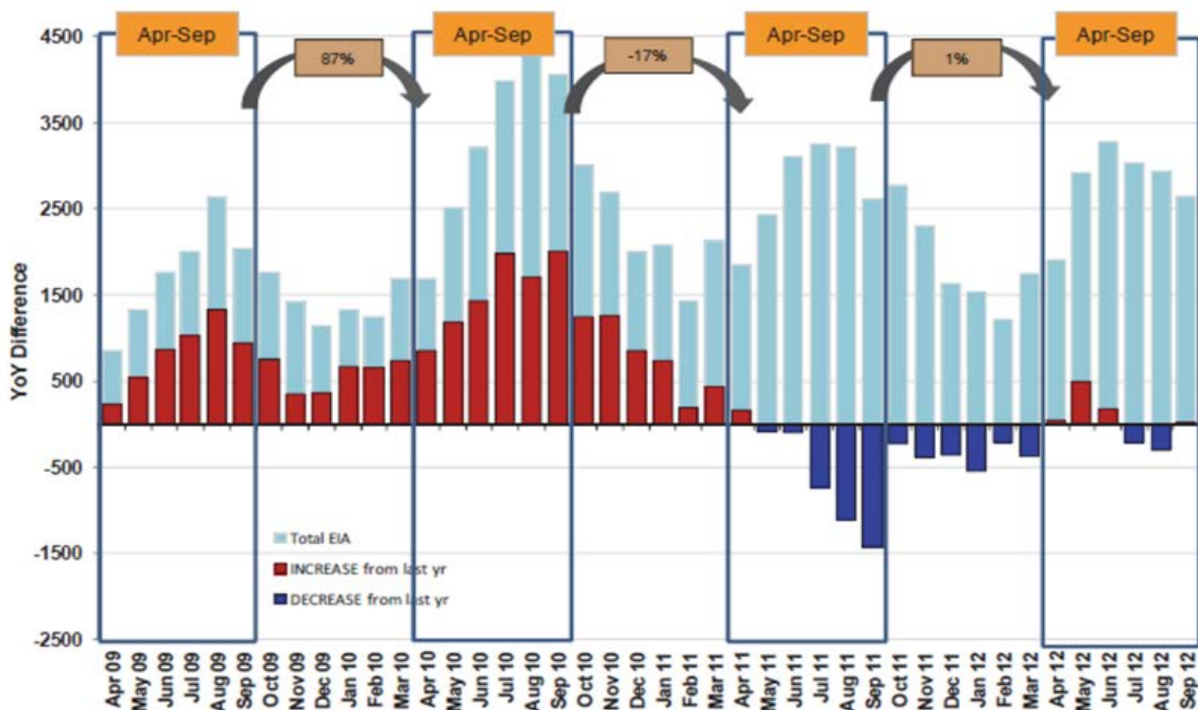


Figure 3: DOD 1230: Enemy Initiated Attacks

Source: Department of Defense. DOD 1230, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, Report to Congress (Washington, DC, December 2012), 159.

This quote illustrates the reliance upon EIAs to determine the progress of security within a region but there is no context provided that may allow the metric to be of any value. The fact that the location of attacks during the time-period had shifted does not indicate an overall increase in security, nor does it provide an accurate assessment of the state of the ongoing insurgency. The following figure (see figure 3) accompanied the DOD 1230 quote. Although it does provide a graphical representation of a rise and fall in EIAs, it does so without context. There is no mention of troop levels and their locations, ongoing operations, or the status of ANSF. A graphic such as this enables the author to misrepresent the data to support his conclusion.

The false assessments did not prompt change until 2013 as annotated in the July 2013 DOD 1230 report to Congress entitled *Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*. “As the nature of the conflict has evolved, it has become clear that a tally of EIAs is not now, nor was it ever, the most complete measure of the campaign’s progress.”<sup>46</sup> Although the transition in metrics marks recognition of poor choice, it does not replace the pool of poor data that informed strategic decision makers since 2008. This dilutes the full picture of progress of the campaign, by conducting assessment from a mid-war point rather from the start and thus encompassing the whole.

The COIN environment is complex and nonlinear. Change in the environment results from the interaction of multiple factors and cannot be measured by a single performance parameter. ISAF has continued use of EIAs as a performance measure departs from complexity theory and does not provide useful information to strategic and political leaders. This fact, however, does not prove that military leaders intentionally deceived strategic decision-makers by their reports but does show, nonetheless, negligence in providing strategic leaders information within the correct context. The improved approach towards assessment, touted in the 2013 DOD 1230 report, has yet to produce evidence of its success. Hosts of assessment methods, such as the Measuring Progress in Conflict Environments Metrics (MPICE) Framework or District Stability Framework (DSF), have recently received attention in various professional journals, but lack proven effectiveness. Regardless of the updated model, since 1945 counterinsurgencies have taken a minimum of fourteen years to succeed. Various collection methodologies and metrics

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<sup>46</sup> Department of Defense, *1230 Report, Progress toward Stability and Security in Afghanistan*, 2013, 8.

present at best a snapshot of a phase rather than the campaign in its whole. Longitudinal data is unavailable and the causes of long-term effects remain unidentified.<sup>47</sup>

Had ISAF integrated additional factors to support their performance measures a clearer picture of progress might have been available. The following section presents a different approach toward security metrics employed towards the end of the American experience in Vietnam, and with it, a different way to think about a complex problem.

### The American Experience in Vietnam

The Vietnam War presents a useful case study of assessment measures because the United States faced in Vietnam the same difficulties developing useful assessments as in Afghanistan. In both conflicts, strategic decision-makers had to determine the progress of stability and security despite inaccurate information that was decontextualized and did not provide a clear understanding of the environment.<sup>48</sup> The Vietnam campaign assessment model was arguably the most complex and detailed model that history has to offer. Although the US initial efforts to conduct campaign assessment in Vietnam were unsuccessful, changes in the assessment system occurred much faster than in Afghanistan. The changes in assessment methods evolved into an assessment model known as the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES). Introduced in 1967, the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) used the HES throughout the remainder of US operations in Vietnam.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, RAND Counterinsurgency Study, Volume 4 (Santa Monica: RAND Publications, 2008), 5. This RAND study claims that successful counterinsurgencies since 1945 require a minimum of fourteen years commitment, while unsuccessful ones average eleven years.

<sup>48</sup> Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*, 140.

<sup>49</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas and Matthew Kocher, *Violence and Control in Civil War: An Analysis of the Hamlet Evaluation System* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2009), 3.

The origins of the US decision to employ COIN tactics in South Vietnam are traceable to a visit by Sir Robert G.K. Thompson to South Vietnam's president Ngo Dinh Diem.<sup>50</sup> During the visit, Thompson convinced Diem to employ a combined military and civil operations approach to clear Viet-Cong controlled areas in South Vietnam. That advice resounded with General Maxwell Taylor, then Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, and helped convince President John F. Kennedy to commit troops to Vietnam.<sup>51</sup> The result was the establishment of MACV in February 1962, and the embarkation on a strategy to isolate South Vietnamese citizens from the communist Viet Cong. The methodology adopted to do so, known as the strategic hamlet program, moved villagers into defensible locations in which the South Vietnamese government could provide adequate security.<sup>52</sup> The approach of separating the population from the Viet-Cong insurgents was one embraced by Kennedy as evidenced by his speech to the West Point graduating class of 1962. "If freedom is to be saved, we need a whole new kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of force, and a wholly different kind of training and commitment."<sup>53</sup> Despite Kennedy's enthusiasm, he did not communicate a concept for combating Communist-based insurgency. As was the case during the early years in Afghanistan, counterinsurgency doctrine was vague and agencies supporting the effort coordinated poorly.<sup>54</sup> Those facts, however, did not delay the commitment of troops as advisors. By the summer of 1963, 16,500 military advisors were in South Vietnam.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Graham A. Cosmos, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2006), 76.

<sup>51</sup> Cosmos, 76-77.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-78.

<sup>53</sup> Herbert R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 32.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

Following the overthrow and assassination of Diem, and the subsequent assassination of Kennedy, the public and the Congress began to scrutinize US efforts in Vietnam. In late December 1963, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara returned from a visit to Vietnam with the belief that if current trends not reversed in the next two to three months, South Vietnam would more than likely become a communist-controlled state.<sup>56</sup> This assessment, along with recommendations made by Taylor, led President Lyndon Johnson to issue his first major Vietnam policy directive. NSAM 288, issued on March 17 1964, reiterated US commitment to help South Vietnam defeat the Viet-Cong and set into motion actions that would lead to “graduated overt military pressures” against North Vietnam.<sup>57</sup> A major aspect of the graduated response was the air campaign, known as Operation Rolling Thunder, which targeted Viet-Cong military and supply targets in South Vietnam. Johnson had not yet made the decision to commit additional ground troops, but remained committed to “taking any action necessary to preserve South Vietnam.”<sup>58</sup> Following a visit to South Vietnam, Johnson held a meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff on March 15, 1965 to charge them with finding new ways to improve the combat situation. During the meeting, he stated that he wanted greater use of air power and high numbers of dead Viet-Cong. He concluded the meeting by stating the he wanted a weekly report on the number of Viet-Cong killed.<sup>59</sup> As such, MACV began structuring itself to provide that detail in their reports, and Viet-Cong body count became the accepted measure to assess success in South Vietnam. This approach towards campaign assessment continued for nearly four years.

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<sup>56</sup> Cosmos, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967*, 117.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 119-120.

<sup>58</sup> McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 248-249.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

The use of body counts as a performance measure in Vietnam greatly inflated the perception of progress and shaped military unit and leader behavior, which eventually led to a devastating surprise when the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) launched the Tet Offensive in 1968. Given the complexity of the COIN environment, performance measures built on a single variable do not add to an understanding of the environment, but rather contribute to entropy in a failing system.<sup>60</sup> Given a lack of guiding doctrine at the time, and the desire to show military progress to strategic leaders in Washington, MACV provided statistics on enemy casualties that were often overinflated and that painted an unrealistic picture of progress.<sup>61</sup> The reports to strategic leaders were so bloated that by 1968, the figures of enemy casualties approached the estimated total strength of the entire number of Viet-Cong as well as the full Tet attack force.<sup>62</sup> Junior intelligence officers in the MACV J-2 made formal complaints that senior commanders were misusing data and understating enemy numbers while overstating enemy losses. This further fueled an intense debate between the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and MACV over the original order of battle numbers for both the Viet-Cong and the NVA. That debate eventually led to complete recounting of enemy forces.<sup>63</sup> The danger of changing a defined variable, such as initial enemy strength, halfway through a campaign is that it hinders time-series analysis and complicates the assessment of progress. It may even reduce the value of accurate reporting.

Following the Tet Offensive in 1968, the picture that MACV had painted for strategic leaders in Washington had nearly no value for estimating campaign progress. This led to growing dissent among the American public, and frustration and distrust within the Johnson

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<sup>60</sup> Axelrod and Cohen, *Harnessing Complexity: Organizational Implications of a Scientific Frontier*, 119-121.

<sup>61</sup> Cosmos, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal, 1968-1973*, 86-87.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Cosmos, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal, 1968-1973*, 87.

administration. The overly optimistic MACV reporting—demanded by political leaders—created a tremendous divide between military and strategic political leaders and clouded the future of US involvement in Vietnam.<sup>64</sup>

The US and ISAF initial efforts to assess progress in Afghanistan closely mirrors the efforts of MACV in Vietnam. At the start of their respective efforts, both headquarters lacked a guiding doctrine to assist in the development of assessment criteria in the COIN environment and both developed an approach over time through trial and error. The early use of a single measure to inform strategic leaders was present in both assessment models, leading to an uncertain picture of progress. The use of EIAs by ISAF shows only the impact of violence in those areas that have some degree of troop presence. As Kilcullen earlier identified, the level of violence within contested areas tends to be higher than government-controlled areas.<sup>65</sup> This dynamic renders the EIA as a single indicator of progress useless for informing strategic political leadership. Similarly, the use of body counts as a single indicator of progress by MACV met Johnson's druthers but proved valueless to strategic leaders. Unlike Afghanistan many years later, Johnson compelled MACV to produce reports based on body counts.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, the shock brought on by the Tet Offensive, an operation thought by some to be impossible because of the inflated reporting, drove a significant gap between military and civilian leaders. The use of body counts in Vietnam serves as a cautionary tale for any planner. The application of attrition warfare measures to COIN not only further convoluted an already complex environment, but also had unintended consequences at the tactical level.<sup>67</sup> The appeal of reporting higher body counts to represent

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>65</sup> Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*, 70.

<sup>66</sup> Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*, 151-152.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 153.

greater effectiveness in combat occurred often at the tactical level, ultimately resulting in confusion of progress at the tactical level as well as the strategic.

### **A Change in Approach**

Strategic leaders in Washington eventually recognized a need for a change in strategy in Vietnam. The change occurred in 1968 when General Creighton Abrams' assumed command of MACV.<sup>68</sup> The eventual change included a restructured approach towards measuring campaign progress known as the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES). Although imperfect, the HES measured a larger spectrum of variables than in Afghanistan. As such, a reasonable degree of accuracy was determinable by a recognized rise and falls in variables. The following section will review the reaction by strategic political leaders and military commanders to the initial measures used in Afghanistan and Vietnam. This section will also analyze the changes in doctrine and campaign assessment models by both ISAF and MACV in their respective theaters. At conclusion, this section will highlight those aspects of change, which are of value to campaign assessment in the COIN environment.

#### **Afghanistan and ISAF**

In May 2014, the US Army published a new version of FM 3-24 *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies*. The manual improves upon the 2006 version.<sup>69</sup> It dedicates a chapter to campaign assessment that includes sections on assessment frameworks, methods, and considerations. The manual also expands the original sections on the development of measurement criteria. The previous version of FM 3-24 did not provide this level of detail, which indicates that lessons neglected in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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<sup>68</sup> Lewis Sorley, *Thunderbolt From the Battle of the Bulge to Vietnam and Beyond: General Creighton Abrams and the Army of His Times* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 255.

<sup>69</sup> FM 3-24, 1.

There are several themes that permeate each section of the assessments chapter, largely revolving around the importance of drawing from several variables in the environment and viewing them in aggregate. The doctrine further provides assessment considerations, emphasizing the fact that a counterinsurgency environment is a political problem, and that assessments should focus on understanding and solving the political problem. The section titled “Afghanistan and ISAF” cautions against reliance upon any assessment method that claims to provide information on the underlying social, cultural, political, and economic turbulence rapidly.<sup>70</sup> The section dedicated to designing measures of effectiveness and performance notes that the raw count of incidents provides little useful information, particularly, when compared to assessments of the scale or sophistication of an attack.<sup>71</sup> Finally, the publication states that above all else, the context in which a measure is used is extremely important. The fact that schools are being built does not mean more students are attending school, and, thus, addressing a political need to provide schooling. The construction of schools is a measure of performance. Unfortunately, it is not also a measure of effectiveness. The section also cautions against the use of enemy casualties as a measure of progress, since greater casualties may indicate an increase in recruits and enemy aggressiveness.<sup>72</sup> The revised FM 3-24 emphasized the importance of context and a focus beyond a single measure in the assessment process. This effort does well to describe the necessary attributes of a COIN assessment model. However, the does not explain how to define an assessment model nor it provide detailed example models.

The revised FM 3-24 does provide some detail concerning the development of measures and certain guiding principles, but leaves room for improvement. The major failure of the later

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<sup>70</sup> FM 3-24, 12-3.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 12-4.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 12-5.

version is its lack of example assessment frameworks for staffs and commanders to build upon. The doctrine does refer to one example, the Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework, but does not provide context or detail for execution.<sup>73</sup> As such, the Army and the joint force are to develop a framework through further trial and error, partially defeating the purpose of a revised doctrine.

In addition to the revised doctrine, there have been several publications released by research organizations and various other groups to assist in the development of a COIN campaign assessment model. To date, doctrine integrated none of these studies.<sup>74</sup> The 2015 *National Security Strategy* (NSS) emphasizes transferring responsibility to ANSF and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA).<sup>75</sup> Consequently, the DOD 1230 reports now provide a focus on transition to Afghan authorities (See figure 4) rather than a focus on security and stability, as the title of the document touts. The focus on transition did not bring with it a refined approach to assessing security and stability. Thus, the shift in emphasis toward transition diverts attention from those aspects of the environment that prove to be indicators of progression or regression.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 12-1.

<sup>74</sup> The Measuring Progress in Conflict Environments (MPICE) framework, published by the United States Institute of Peace in 2010, is the most detailed example.

<sup>75</sup> Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy 2015* (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 2015), 9-10.



fact, as of January 2015, ISAF classified the data dealing with the expenditure of funds allocated to training the ANSF as well as data on reconstruction and infrastructure improvement efforts. This data was previously releasable.<sup>77</sup> The classification of previously unclassified data indicates distrust in the ability for ISAF to assess progress, and an internal lack of confidence in the system built to do so.

Although many are clearly dissatisfied with ISAF's approach to campaign assessment, the changes made, primarily in Army doctrine, were not enough to improve the quality of reports to strategic political leaders. Reporting that is not holistic, and presents a single measure as an indicator of progress does not assist strategic leaders with the information for sound decision-making, the primary purpose of such reports as the DOD 1230. The record shows that the US and ISAF did not draw appropriate historical lessons from the experience in Vietnam. Similar to ISAF, MACV in Vietnam had an opportunity to assess its methodology and make necessary adjustments. Although the HES did not reach its highest level of sophistication until nearly the US withdrawal from Vietnam, it does provide a useful model from which contemporary staffs can build an effective campaign assessment model. The following section will analyze said changes and indicate which ones are particularly useful today.

#### Vietnam and MACV

Beginning in 1967, MACV faced a steadily growing requirement for collection and reporting. McNamara drove the requirements and they nearly overwhelmed the MACV staff.<sup>78</sup> To relieve the stress placed on MACV, Johnson made the decision in 1967 to establish a

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<sup>77</sup> Phillipa H. Stewart, "Quietly Classifying US Spending in Afghanistan," *AlJazeera, War and Conflict* (February 3, 2015), accessed February 11, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/02/quietly-classifying-spending-afghanistan-150201141449193.html>

<sup>78</sup> Cosmos, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967*, 290.

supporting headquarters known the Office of Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS). The president gave CORDS the responsibility for pacification in South Vietnam and appointed Ambassador Robert Komer, a former Army officer, as the director. Komer was the only civilian to possess control over military operations in Vietnam.<sup>79</sup> Under Komer, the HES framework for assessment began implementation. The system collected and correlated reports that fueled analysis in the Office of Systems Analysis back in Washington.<sup>80</sup> The CIA originally created the HES for use by CORDS in response to dissatisfaction with the original “body count” reporting. It existed as part of the Pacification Evaluation System (PACES), a fully automated system designed to determine who controlled the population of South Vietnam.<sup>81</sup>

Although HES was once controversial, recent researchers have found the HES to be useful for understanding the complexities of assessment in the COIN environment. The HES provides a starting point for a holistic assessment framework. According to Stathis Kalyvas, “The HES is likely to remain for some time the only systematic micro-level database of civil war dynamics covering such a large territory and time period.”<sup>82</sup> In his analysis, Kalyvas addresses criticisms of the data, but still finds the HES to be a “unique resource for the study of the dynamics of civil wars in terms of its scope, detail, and level of analysis.”<sup>83</sup> A 1975 Naval War College study of the HES found that despite a degree of bias induced by District Senior Advisors

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<sup>79</sup> Cosmos, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967*, 360-362.

<sup>80</sup> Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*, 138.

<sup>81</sup> Douglas Kinnard, *The War Managers* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1977), 107.

<sup>82</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas and Matthew Kocher, “The Dynamics of Violence in Vietnam: An Analysis of the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES)” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 46, No 3 (May 2009), 342-343.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

(DSAs) the measurement of the HES pacification indicators was quite satisfactory . . . and that the HES [ought to] be retained for further development, and that a proponent [ought to] be designated.”<sup>84</sup> Additionally, a RAND study of the statistical item analysis of the December 1967 HES data by Anders Sweetland found the system to be meaningful and mathematically stable.<sup>85</sup> Given the amount of scholarly research that found value in the HES, there is value in analyzing the framework to determine what attributes of the framework are applicable to an assessment framework for Afghanistan.

The HES geographical framework appears remarkably similar to what ISAF is attempting to achieve in its revised campaign plan. Each province, district, village, and hamlet in South Vietnam possessed a unique HES identification number and designated spatial coordinates. With the cooperation of local officials, US District Senior Advisors (DSAs) evaluated the status of each hamlet and village under their jurisdiction on a monthly and quarterly basis. The HES was originally an attempt to systemize and digitize a less formal prior practice of the South Vietnamese government to assign letter ratings to the security status at the local level.<sup>86</sup> The HES data collection occurred via a series of worksheets provided at the district and provincial level by provincial advisory teams.<sup>87</sup> The worksheets themselves resembled the modern bubble sheet.

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<sup>84</sup> Albert C. Bole, *An Evaluation of the Measurements of the Hamlet Evaluation System* (Newport: Center for Advanced Research, Naval War College Press, 1975), ii.

<sup>85</sup> Anders Sweetland, *Item Analysis of the HES* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1968), ii.

<sup>86</sup> Kalyvas and Kocher, *Violence and Control in Civil War: An Analysis of the Hamlet Evaluation System*, 3.

<sup>87</sup> Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*, 154.

The HES questionnaire rated six major “factors,” equivalent to the modern day MOEs/MOPs, and had spaces for narrative inputs.<sup>88</sup> It required DSAs to rate Hamlets from A-E or V on 18 indicators of relative insurgent/government control. Averaged numerical responses to these questions provided the baseline data for reports forward to the OSA in Washington.<sup>89</sup>

<b>Status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>A</b>	581	10.52	10.52
<b>B</b>	2035	36.85	47.37
<b>C</b>	802	14.52	61.89
<b>D</b>	212	3.84	65.73
<b>E</b>	144	2.61	68.33
<b>V</b>	11	0.20	68.53

Figure 5: HES Worksheet Ratings

Source: Stathis N. Kalyvas and Matthew Kocher, *Violence and Control in Civil War: An Analysis of the Hamlet Evaluation System* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007), 10.

The HES underwent a series of changes over a six-year period. The rapid changes to the HES in Vietnam eventually produced in a useful framework. However, when viewed in aggregate there is a distorted picture of progress. A major source of controversy over the earlier versions of the HES (1967-1969) stemmed from the influence military commanders had over responses to the HES questionnaires. The later versions of HES (1970-1971) had respondents fill out more qualitative questionnaires, with analysts at a level above the local commander level assigning the codes, or values to the data.<sup>90</sup> At the cost of time-series comparisons, the frequent debates over the HES definitions occurred, and changes to the pre-coded ratings occurred nearly annually

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Kalyvas and Kocher, *Violence and Control in Civil War: An Analysis of the Hamlet Evaluation System*, 9.

<sup>90</sup> Lewis Sorley, *Vietnam Chronicles: the Abrams Tapes, 1968-1972* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2004), 331.

through 1973.<sup>91</sup> A change in a fixed variable promoted further debate within MACV, CORDS, and the OSA. Another initial problem with the HES was how data averaging occurred to represent progress. Because Hamlets received a score based on several indicators on a scale of 1-5, analysts used an average to provide a single overall rating.<sup>92</sup> A former HES manager, Colonel Erwin R. Brigham explained how this process worked. “A hamlet with a security sector rating of 3 As, 4 Bs, and 2Cs; and a development sector rating of 2 Cs, 4 Ds, and 3 Es would receive an overall rating of C. Similarly, A, B, D, and E hamlets may have individual ratings of A, B, C, D, and E.”<sup>93</sup> The problem with this approach was that by providing an average, it did not help the analyst to understand the context of the environment. Was development inconsequential due to a lack of security? How did the average villager view his or her own security? Without appropriate context, the qualitative aspects of the assessed hamlets remained hidden and, thus, left to the report author’s imagination.

The averaged data fueled reports typically delivered to senior decision makers. As such, the results of such reports were an average based upon a series averages to inform policy. Averages present a danger to accurate assessment. Averages smooth out large differences, which reduced the transparency and accuracy of the HES data to a point, that the overall number was nearly meaningless.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, strategic political leadership used the HES to present progress in pacification, completely out of context. George Allen, one of the most respected intelligence

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<sup>91</sup> Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*, 157.

<sup>92</sup> Connable, 157.

<sup>93</sup> Erwin R. Brigham, “*Pacification Measurement in Vietnam: The Hamlet Evaluation System*,” Civil Operations for Revolutionary Development Support (Vietnam: Headquarters, Military Assistance Command, 1968), 9-10.

<sup>94</sup> Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*, 166.

analysts during the Vietnam provided an account of how the HES results were misunderstood and misused:

[W]e got pressure from the White House, the way they used the Hamlet Evaluation System. They were the ones that decided this A-B-C-D-E, or 5-4-3-2-1 scale, you could come up with an aggregate average score for all the hamlets in Vietnam, monthly, and it was 2.163 maybe this month. And they would sit there with [bated] breath waiting to see what next month's score would be. And if it were 2.165, two one-thousandths higher than last month, "Great, we're progressing, we're progressing!"<sup>95</sup>

Allen's insight provides a lens into how the HES and its associated reports influenced strategic policy makers. Congressman John Tunney, a sitting member of Congress at the time, shared Allen's perspective. According to Tunney, "Presidential advisors have briefed Members of the Congress and told them that a certain percentage usually carried to one or two decimal places, of the South Vietnamese people were living in relatively secure areas under the control of the Saigon government." He further asserted "this information was being used at the highest levels of the US government as a guide to operational planning and as a means of informing the American people of the progress of the war."<sup>96</sup> What the HES lacked was the context to accompany the data. The lack of balance between qualitative and quantitative data, contextualized beyond the efforts of an intelligence analyst, left the consumers of the HES—strategic policy makers—dissatisfied with the information they were receiving, and suspicious of the military headquarters providing the reports. Given the poor ratings of the HES, this begs the question of what lessons could be drawn from the HES and applied to contemporary campaign assessment? Thomas Thayer, author of *War without Fronts* and former director of the Southeast Asia Intelligence and Force Effectiveness Division (SAIFED) provides some clues to an answer.

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<sup>95</sup> Mai Elliott, *RAND in Southeast Asia: A History of the Vietnam War Era* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2010), 93.

<sup>96</sup> John V. Tunney, *Measuring Hamlet Security in Vietnam: Report of a Special Study Mission* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, December 1968), 1.

Thayer initially served as a lower level analyst during the Vietnam War before rising to be the SAIFED director within the OSA.<sup>97</sup> His efforts while serving in that capacity provided the best comprehensive campaign assessment in COIN. Thayer published the *Southeast Asia Analysis Report*, later republished in a twelve-volume series titled *A Systems Analysis View of the Vietnam War*. Although his reports were unofficial, due to their being the only effort to aggregate the war reporting, they became widely read and influential within Washington<sup>98</sup> He later published *War without Fronts*, which was a critique of his previous efforts to analyze the assessment efforts. Although he was critical of much of the averaged data, he presented the concept of “reasonable accuracy,” which finds value in the trends presented by the HES. Thayer believed that despite the inaccuracy of field reporting, a reasonable degree of accuracy to show useful patterns and trends is possible.<sup>99</sup> This concept presents an interesting proposal but requires a baseline aggregate from which to determine trends. What Thayer lacked at the time and remains undeveloped, is a useful doctrine that expands upon his reasonable accuracy concept.

MACV’s experience with the application of the HES provides a useful case study from which to develop a doctrinal framework for campaign assessment in COIN. The transition from a focus on a single measure, to other aspects of progress, represents an ability to derive lessons from negative feedback. The integration of the HES framework however never achieved its goal of informing strategic decision makers. This failure resulted from presenting the aggregate assessment based on averages separated from the geographic context. The fact however remains that the trial and failure effort of the HES provides an excellent historical example from which to build an accurate COIN campaign assessment framework.

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<sup>97</sup> Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*, 141.

<sup>98</sup> Connable, 157.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Thayer, *War without Fronts: The American Experience in Vietnam* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 152.

## Comparing the Frameworks

The Vietnam-era experience with assessments provides valuable historical lessons. The need for a balance between quantitative and qualitative measures, Thayer's concept of reasonable accuracy, and the importance of keeping the variables consistent are a few of the invaluable lessons learned by MACV over a six-year period. This experience could provide ISAF a pool of knowledge from which to develop potential frameworks for assessment. To determine whether ISAF has improved its measures, a comparison of the ISAF framework to the lessons provided by the Vietnam-era experience is necessary.

The July 2013 DOD 1230 report touted a change in approach towards assessment, having recognized an overreliance upon violence as an indicator of progress.<sup>100</sup> Since then the US and ISAF have claimed to use a series of frameworks to feed assessments, derived from a series of factors beyond violence. At present, it is unclear what assessment framework ISAF has adopted. District Stability Framework (DSF), a US Agency for International Development (USAID) model, has received much attention in professional journals, and ISAF has acknowledged that it is used. According to ISAF, "The DSF is designed to directly target the root causes of instability using carefully thought out, cost effective activities."<sup>101</sup> Along with the identification of causes of instability, the DSF claims to establish a baseline to measure effects over time.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Department of Defense, *DOD 1230, Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan* (July 2013), 8.

<sup>101</sup> NATO. "District Stability Framework in Afghanistan." last modified March 13, 2012, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.aco.nato.int/district-stability-framework-in-afghanistan.aspx>.

<sup>102</sup> Mirko L. Crnkovich, "District Stability Framework: Social Science Underpinnings of Complex Operations" (presented at the MORS Mini-Symposium through the US Agency for International Development, Office of Military Affairs) accessed October 22, 2014, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a535679.pdf>

The Counterinsurgency Training Center-Afghanistan (CTC-A) and USAID developed the DSF through a cooperative effort in 2012. Per the published DSF “quick reference guide,” the purpose of DSF is to “utilize a range of situational awareness and planning tools to inform stability planning.”<sup>103</sup> The DSF claims to develop a baseline for measuring whether stability is increasing or decreasing through use of a field-level tool focused on variables beyond violence (see figure 6).

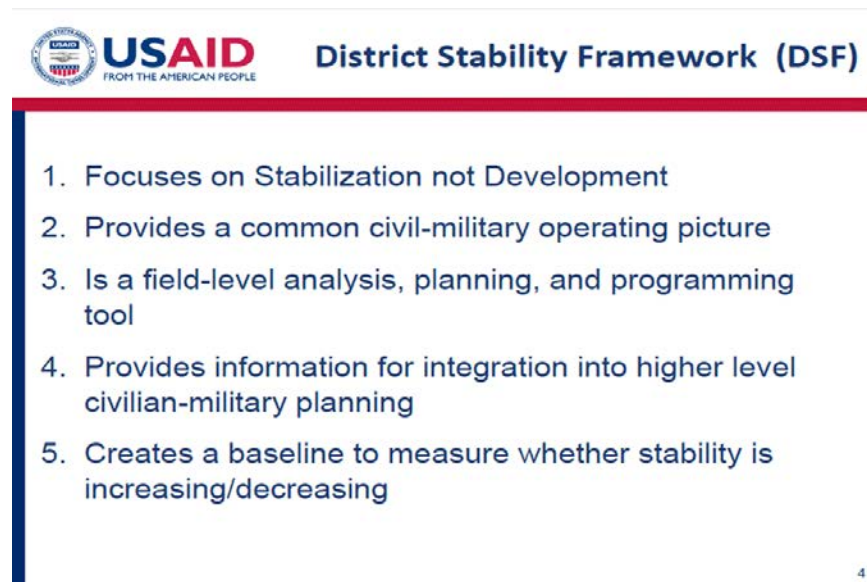


Figure 6: DSF Focus Areas


Source: Mirko L. Crnkovich, “District Stability Framework: Social Science Underpinnings of Complex Operations” (presented at the MORS Mini-Symposium through the US Agency for International Development, Office of Military Affairs) accessed October 22, 2014, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a535679.pdf>.

The DSF appears to be an improvement from the SIGACT collection effort by the AAG. Through its field tools and inquiry process, the DSF claims to be able to measure variables ranging from government legitimacy to security perceptions (see Figure 7). The expansion of

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<sup>103</sup> US Agency for International Development, *District Stability Framework Quick Reference Guide*, accessed February 22, 2014, 1, [http://www.mccdc.marines.mil/Portals/172/Docs/SWCIWID/STAB/DSF\\_Quick\\_Reference\\_Guide\\_Dec\\_2010-COP-239.pdf](http://www.mccdc.marines.mil/Portals/172/Docs/SWCIWID/STAB/DSF_Quick_Reference_Guide_Dec_2010-COP-239.pdf).

variables theoretically should inform stability and security better than single indicators of violence.

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## Monitoring & Evaluation

Three Levels of Evaluation:

1. Were the activities completed? (MOP/Output)
2. Were the intended effects achieved? (MOE/Impact)
3. Is Overall Stability increasing? For example:
  - I. Government Legitimacy
  - II. Local on Local Violence
  - III. Economic Health
  - IV. Local Security Forces Presence
  - V. Freedom of Movement
  - VI. Governance Perceptions
  - VII. Security perceptions

**KEY: DSF establishes a baseline to measure effects over time**

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Figure 7: DSF Measures

*Source:* Mirko L. Crnkovich, “District Stability Framework: Social Science Underpinnings of Complex Operations” (presented at the MORS Mini-Symposium through the US Agency for International Development, Office of Military Affairs) accessed October 22, 2014, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a535679.pdf>.

In order to achieve the three levels of evaluation referenced in Figure 7, the DSF claims to employ a cyclical approach that include waypoints of situational awareness, analysis, design, and monitoring and evaluation respectively.<sup>104</sup> To achieve a degree of situational awareness that informs progress, the DSF claims to use a four-step process (see figure 8) of environmental factor analysis to build situational awareness. In addition to the cyclical framework, DSF provides a series of matrices, generic questionnaires, and other synchronization tools to assist in collection to

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<sup>104</sup> Mirko L. Crnkovich, “District Stability Framework: Social Science Underpinnings of Complex Operations,” accessed October 22, 2014, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a535679.pdf>.

inform assessment. At a surface level, this approach takes into account many of the variables that the HES attempted to address the pacification efforts in South Vietnam.



Figure 8: DSF Situational Awareness Approach

Source: Mirko L. Crnkovich, "District Stability Framework: Social Science Underpinnings of Complex Operations" (presented at the MORS Mini-Symposium through the US Agency for International Development, Office of Military Affairs) accessed October 22, 2014, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a535679.pdf>.

The DSF provides a compilation of assessment tools and guidance for the development of stability and security. This framework does appear to draw from the variables addressed by the HES, particularly attitudinal, security, and governance perceptions. What the DSF lacks, what ISAF does not address, and what the HES was most deficient in, is the methodology or form of collection for reasonable accuracy.

One of the major criticisms of the HES was the corruption of data by field commanders with competing interests. A major source of controversy in the earlier versions of the HES (1967-1969) was the local military commander's influence over responses to the HES questionnaires. The later versions of HES (1970-1971) had respondents fill out more qualitative questionnaires, with analysts at a level above the local commander level assigning the codes, or values to the

data.<sup>105</sup> There is no evidence that the US and ISAF have restructured its approach to reach the level of sophistication acquired through trial and error in Vietnam. This means that ISAF must not only adopt a framework which uses measures beyond acts of violence, but must also address the form and function of collection to improve assessment accuracy. This requires a reliance upon data beyond SIGACTs and reports compiled at the battalion and brigade level. To reach the level of sophistication that the HES had, a dedicated effort is required avoid the natural tendency amongst commanders to adjust data to show greater progress. The value of the HES was not simply the variables measured, but rather the system in its whole, how it approached measures and sought to improve itself. Although ISAF has recognized a deficiency in the measures collected and the quality of its assessments, it has not made the necessary adjustments to produce assessments that are useful for strategic and political leader decision making.

### **Conclusion**

Senior political leadership and military professionals have expressed dissatisfaction with assessments produced to show the progress toward stability and security in Afghanistan. This sentiment derives from the fact that the US and ISAF measured progress in stability and security solely through a rise and fall in acts of violence—in particular, enemy initiated ambushes.<sup>106</sup> A campaign requires accurate assessments, derived from carefully selected measures to inform decision-making. Despite recognizing the flaw, there is no evidence that ISAF has yet developed a more effective framework. The lack of progress is attributable to a dearth of useful doctrine and the inability of ISAF to develop an approach informed by historical examples. Despite the revised

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<sup>105</sup> Sorley, *Vietnam Chronicles: The Abrams Tapes, 1968-1972*, 331.

<sup>106</sup> Cordesman, Gold, and Hess, *The Afghan War in 2013: Meeting the Challenges of Transition* Vol. 1, 10.

doctrine, the US and ISAF might have accelerated insight through the review of variables developed by the HES and the lessons learned by MACV in its assessment framework.

In order to determine progress over time, an assessment plan should be in place prior to execution of a campaign. This affords strategic leaders and operational commanders alike the ability to view longitudinal data and determine causality of long-term effects.<sup>107</sup> Without a useful assessment plan, success and failure is easily misattributed, leading to a misconstrued strategy. This fact requires military planners to dedicate effort to the development of an assessment plan with measures related to the context of the campaign and its desired end state. The current doctrine loosely describes what assessment plans should consist of, but fails to provide a useful framework, context, or historical lessons learned. A revision of the current doctrine is required to rectify this problem. Such a revision requires an example framework that does not just describe a framework, but explain the complexity of accurate assessment in COIN, provide a useful framework and example measures, recommend collection methodologies and task organization, as well as provide historical examples.

Despite a lack of guiding doctrine, the HES and MACV experiences in the development of assessment plans provide a useful historical example from which ISAF can develop an accurate assessment plan. The HES, although initially flawed, continuously improved to meet the requirements of senior strategic leaders. The change in variables caused an inability to view longitudinal data, similar to the current situation in Afghanistan. Regardless, the steps taken by MACV to prevent corruption of data by field commanders and improve the quality of reporting provide insight into the complexity of campaign assessment in COIN, and valuable lessons for military planners.

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<sup>107</sup> Reilly, *Operational Design: Distilling Clarity from Complexity for Decisive Action*, 114-115.

The military planner draws approaches and plans not only from doctrine, but also from theory and history. Given a lack of useful doctrine, the military planner should look to other sources to inform his efforts. The US and ISAF's assessment plan failed to reach the level of sophistication achieved by MACV in Vietnam. Although ISAF recognized fault in its assessment plan, and claims to have changed its approach, there is no evidence to support such a claim. The integration of DSF as an assessment model provides a useful example for what assessment is supposed to achieve, but does not address the challenges of data collection nor what a headquarters should do with such data. The evolution of the HES provides the necessary context in which a military planner can build an accurate assessment plan. The failure of the US and ISAF to cull the appropriate lessons from history has led to uninformed assessments and dissatisfied strategic and political leaders. As such, military planners cannot afford to ignore the haunting rhymes of history, and the lessons provided by the HES and MACV.

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