



An Irony of War: Human Development as Warfare in Afghanistan

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Afghanistan is an enduring drama in which US armed forces are destined to play a role for many years. It is a country beset by an insurgency that threatens to destroy the 9-year economic progress that many Afghans have enjoyed since the end of Taliban rule. Many students of insurgency, or any other type of warfare, do not associate human development with counterinsurgency (COIN). In fact, "Human development" is not a standard term in the lexicon of war. It is a term coined in the late 20th Century to describe broad-based development in multiple sectors of an economy. Today, economists use this term regularly when referring to plans and projects designed to increase standards of living for the world's poor.

The World Bank popularized the term "human development" in the 1980s, and in 1990 produced a Human Development Index.¹ The United Nations argued that "Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices. The

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Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE OCT 2010		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2010 to 00-00-2010	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE An Irony of War: Human Development as Warfare in Afghanistan				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 66027				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

most critical of these wide-ranging choices are to live a long and healthy life, to be educated, and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living.”² When Coalition forces in Afghanistan work to develop the economy, public administration, health system, communications, education, and, sometimes, the rule of law and security, they are trying to build human development in Afghanistan.

This paper will focus on the developmental, rather than the lethal or kinetic, aspects of COIN to defeat the insurgency in Afghanistan. US COIN doctrine has evolved to place a premium on working with indigenous populations to enable them to better their lives. Traditionally, warfare has been associated with harming people and destroying targets. But there is an irony, of sorts, to the current COIN in Afghanistan: this war is heavily focused on building and not on killing or destroying. According to doctrine, the Afghan insurgents will be defeated, primarily, by creating a generation of Afghans who see the government as their ally in building an economically promising future.³

Students of COIN would benefit from understanding how transformational a shift in thinking has occurred in the 20th Century. In that century, US Army planners were confronted with the need to understand the complexities and nuances involved in defeating an enemy that lives among the people and often does not wear a uniform. In this 21st Century, many soldiers will still be required to close with and kill the enemy. But, the more potent weapons

for defeating insurgents in Afghanistan and in a future insurgency are likely to include agricultural development, an effective health-care system, and education, farms, health clinics, and schools. Many soldiers in this century will partner with locals and help them develop and reconstruct their countries.

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Small Wars, Large Wars, and Afghanistan

The COIN in Afghanistan may be the first of the 21st Century for the US, but it is one war of many in the last 100 years. In the 20th Century, US forces fought both large and small wars around the world. The US Army and the doctrine that guided its operations traditionally had a large war focus. There is no precise, universally accepted definition of large war, nor is there one of small war.⁴ But larger wars involve the mass mobilization of the US military and work force. Their enemy is often, though not always, a foreign state, such as Germany, Japan, or Italy. The goals in large wars often require the enemy to surrender, sometimes on a specific set of conditions, as was the case in World War I, or without conditions, as in World War II. If the US was engaged in a middle-size war, it was probably that in Korea.

There are significant differences between small and large wars, particularly as they relate to human development. Large wars are, by definition, more destructive than small wars, and human development is far more likely to be targeted in larger wars.⁵ In World War II, Allied forces tried to annihilate the military capabilities of the Axis states, which required the vast destruction of cities and economic infrastructure. As opposed to the total war orientation of World War II-type conflicts, tactics in small wars—and COIN is a small war—rarely focus so intensely on such vast destruction of human development. Rather, US COIN operations have applied comprehensive developmental schemes to defeat the enemy.



Figure 1: Afghanistan and region

The Philippines Insurrection began at the turn of the 20th Century and lasted for many years. The COIN against the Muslims in Moro areas was a long, brutal, but eventually successful struggle, led by BG John Pershing. Much as in Afghanistan today, the US military expanded constabulary operations using local indigenous forces in kinetic and non-kinetic roles and “pacification programs introduced infrastructure-rebuilding programs with an emphasis on education and governmental reform.”⁶

If there is a “Father of US COIN,” it is probably John J. Pershing, or “Blackjack Pershing.” Pershing developed respect and rapport with those whom he commanded and used his strong interpersonal skills to win the confidence of indigenous Filipinos.⁷ Pershing stressed the necessity to understand local habits, customs, and religious practices, and these principles lay the foundation for the COIN in Afghanistan today. He also worked with locals to foster a public administration that would build stake holders and undercut the credibility of the insurgent Moros. It was the focus on human development, as much as the effective and innovative military tactics, which became the bedrock of success there.



Figure 2: Blackjack Pershing (National Archives)

Another milestone in the evolution of US COIN doctrine was the British COIN in Malaya. The US Army studied the British mid-century COIN in Malaya, which was very successful and which emphasized a human development strategy, as well as the unsuccessful French COIN operations in French Indo-China and Algeria, which used force and the threat of force more frequently and, ultimately, with less success. The lessons from all insurgencies were distilled and codified in US professional journals and written into doctrine.⁸

The 1950s and 1960s was a “golden age” of COIN literature. Several outstanding COIN theoreticians were the British officer and diplomat Sir Robert Thompson; French officer LTC David Galula,⁹ called the “counterinsurgency Clausewitz;”¹⁰ and the American former advertising executive-turned-COIN theorist Edward Landsdale. The writings and observations of these men would serve as pillars for a revised US COIN doctrine.¹¹

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COIN doctrine evolved during Vietnam. One important COIN innovation which was revised, updated, expanded, and given a different name for use in Afghanistan and Iraq, was the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS). Putting theory into practice, CORDS leveraged the capabilities of military and civilian agencies in a “unique hybrid civil-military structure.”¹² It harnessed the efforts of the US military and all the civilian agencies involved in COIN efforts, including the State Department, the US Agency for International Development (AID), the US Information Agency (USIA) and the CIA.¹³ The basic model would be replicated and heavily revised for use in Iraq and Afghanistan under a different name – provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs).

CORDS was successful. Historians differ on the full extent to which CORDS eviscerated the communist insurgency, but most agree that by 1972 it had largely been destroyed.¹⁴ Leveraging tactics from the British in Malaya, CORDS focused on human development fundamentals, health, security, and economic fundamentals. Unfortunately, the successes of CORDS were not sufficiently written into doctrine to provide lessons for students at the academies, command and staff colleges, or war colleges.¹⁵ But the lessons were not lost entirely.

Over 30 years later, these lessons would be analyzed in detail and written into doctrine by an eclectic band of scholars, soldiers, and journalists who would forge a new COIN manual. In February 2006, LTG David Petraeus, then commanding general of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, directed this “odd fraternity” to revise and reinvigorate COIN doctrine.¹⁶ The crafters of new COIN doctrine would advise that soldiers, scholars such as anthropologists, and developmental specialists such as economists and health care practitioners, coordinate their efforts in what would become CORDS-like units, which would later be called PRTs.

The table below shows some overlapping traits of the three epochs of COIN literature and their applications to Afghanistan. These are not discrete epochs and many of their lessons apply to conflicts of COIN generally.

	Philippines	The Golden Age of COIN	Vietnam
Legacy traits	Stressing non-kinetic action over direct attacks, Pershing saw need to develop respectful relations with Muslim Filipinos and understand their culture and ceremonies; Pershing expanded and professionalized constabulary force and basic public administration. Survived bad publicity of torture by US troops, particularly water-boarding. ¹⁷	In Malaya, British determined that building and securing settlements and isolating the insurgent contagion is more effective than focusing almost exclusively on search-and-destroy missions. Greater emphasis of education, training, health than in earlier conflicts in the developing world. This was in striking contrast to the Japanese and German COIN tactics of mass murder during WWII, which alienated those who survived and who might have been their allies. The French win the Battle for Algiers, but lose the war in Algeria	CORDS fused development and military COIN efforts as never before, hoping to achieve unity of command. Secure public housing, sometimes referred to as "strategic hamlets" was developed on a large, systematic scale. All relevant sectors of human development were stressed in isolating the insurgents – the National Liberation Front – from the population. The success of CORDS would be replicated in Iraq and Afghanistan in the PRTs.
Application to Afghanistan	Human development is stressed over kinetic operations. Focus on respecting Muslim beliefs and norms. Project image of being friends not conquerors.	Understand the need to have long-term, sustainable development across many sectors. Reduce level of collateral killings and damage. When accidents occur, move quickly to make restitution.	From Vietnam, and from Golden Age, strategic hamlets program served as a model. Engage and destroy the enemy and hold the area. Separate population from the insurgents. Build human development.

Figure 3: Legacy Traits of Three Epochs of COIN and their Application to Afghanistan

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At the turn of the 21st Century, the Pentagon's approach to devising new COIN doctrine drew lessons from the previous insurgencies and from the scholarship in the COIN canon.¹⁸ It tried to explore new military tactics and technologies, particularly advances in surveillance and reconnaissance. It fused recent approaches to human development, such as civil engineering, public health, wireless communications, and agriculture to defeat insurgencies.

The new doctrine, the US Army and Marine Corps Field Manual (FM) 3-24 *Counterinsurgency*, hereafter referred to as FM 3-24, was produced in partial response to the inadequacies of existing Army and Marine Corps war-fighting doctrine which focused primarily on large wars and only secondarily on insurgencies.¹⁹ Those who crafted the new COIN doctrine determined that using human development as a weapon to defeat the enemy had been neglected. They saw that a calculus for measuring success in COIN might use developmental indicators because development is so tightly fused with COIN that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish clearly between them.²⁰ The number of schools built and sufficiently staffed with teachers and supplies in a contested area may be a more important metric than the number of insurgents killed in the area.

The new doctrine offers both negative and positive inducements to persuade insurgents to lay down their weapons. It uses military and non-military tactics to separate the insurgents from the populace, in the hopes of isolating the contagion of insurgency. It tries to destroy the insurgents' bases of support while gaining credibility and the cooperation of the populace.²¹ It also rewards populations who resist the insurgents by helping them build their villages and enjoy the benefits of human development, including higher living standards, better health and education, and increased security .

The authors of FM 3-24 found that successful COIN practices often required engaging with the population; learning their habits, customs, and idiosyncrasies; protecting and building infrastructure; tailoring information operations; engaging local politicians; and denying sanctuary for the insurgents. The field manual is very clear on the primacy of human development in defusing insurgencies. COIN operators became, in effect, custodians of the populace as long as the insurgency thrives.²² Killing was de-emphasized, as the doctrine stressed the non-lethal theories.²³

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Another reason why the FM 3-24 authors subordinated kinetic efforts to non-kinetic efforts was because of the lessons they gleaned from the Soviet experience in Afghanistan. In the 1980s, the aggressive Soviet military tactics failed. The Soviets pursued a virtual scorched-earth policy that built resistance to their occupation and forfeited the good will they built through their often successful developmental programs in the preceding 30 years. Some of the tactics became notorious, such as booby-trapping toys and targeting population centers for indiscriminate attacks. The Soviet attack and failure collapsed the USSR's remaining prestige in the Third World and enraged the Islamic world.²⁴ The authors of FM 3-24 were careful not to replicate Soviet failures brought on by morbid tactics and wholesale brutalization.

US military planners continued to produce texts on insurgency beyond FM 3-24. As the US fought two significant COINs in Iraq and Afghanistan, US Army strategists took note of successes and failures. By 2007, the US Army produced another document that soon became an integral text on the COIN in Afghanistan. "The PRT Playbook – Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures"²⁵ was written by the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), Fort Leavenworth, KS, to document what, in the judgment of the US Army, were the most important lessons of the PRTs in Afghanistan are Iraq.²⁶ While FM 3-24 gave broad guidance on how the COIN should be fought, the Playbook provided the details. A common denominator of the new COIN texts is the emphasis on and respect for human development.

Human Developmental, PRTs, HTTs and the COIN in Afghanistan

This is not the first time the US has channeled substantial monies into building shattered societies in hopes of fostering long-term stability. Policy makers in Washington, as well as US military governors in Europe, determined that massive reconstruction and development projects, which became known as the Marshall Plan, would undercut subversive efforts in Europe. In this spirit, international donors to Afghanistan's reconstruction and development determined that a multi-year and multi-billion-dollar program would help build security and rule of law in Afghanistan. This is because members in a nation with rising standards of living standards are more likely to see themselves as shareholders in that state than those who have no vested interests in a prosperous future.

A mission of the COIN in Afghanistan is to promote *sustained* development, but this is ambitious for the near term. The most immediate goal is to rescue Afghanistan

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from its status as a failing state, and this is what the US and other pro-government forces are attempting to do. Today, Afghanistan is only one of many failed states, which are those with extremely low levels of human development. Defining characteristics of failed states include the *inability* to control the physical territory of the state; provide basic social services, such as electricity, potable water, emergency services, police services; collect adequate tax revenue or combat corruption; sustain adequate levels of economic growth, employment, job creation; mitigate the effects of social and sexual discrimination and group-based inequality; and prevent the erosion of the environment.²⁷ In the table below traits of failed states are listed with application to Afghanistan.

Traits of a Failed or Failing State	Application to Afghanistan
Inability to control the physical territory	Beset by insurgency and narco-traffickers. The full reach of the Taliban expands and contracts periodically. Afghans exist in state of fear in border areas with Pakistan.
Inability to provide basic services	Lack of capacity, extensive corruption, and disorganized civil service militate against effective public administration. However, the delivery of basic services is improving significantly in cities and slowly in villages.
Inability to sustain adequate levels of economic growth, employment, job creation	There is strong economic performance and job creation in Afghanistan. However, some of this growth continues in the illicit narcotics agri-business. Insurgents threaten prosperity.
Inability to mitigate the effects of social and sexual discrimination and group-based inequality	There is vast inequality between the sexes, as well as tribal inequities. But, the gaps are closely, if very slowly.

Figure 4. Attributes of a Failed State and Their Application to Afghanistan.

The urgency with which micro-economic development was pursued explains the importance of the PRT. The PRTs were created in 2002 from a concept in that year's National Security Strategy. Originally referred to as Coalition Humanitarian Liaison Cells

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in Operation Enduring Freedom, the first team was deployed to Gardez on December 31, 2002. By April 2003, twelve teams, nine of which were U S led and the others led by the United Kingdom, New Zealand and NATO were operational. ²⁸ They were deployed to distant outposts, far removed from Kabul or any other city, and charged with leading small-scale reconstruction projects, determining humanitarian needs and coordinating efforts with non-governmental organizations.²⁹



**Figure 5: A PRT Commander Participating in a local shura, or elders council.
(Combined Joint Task Force 101 Photo Gallery)**

The goal was to create a team of specialists from the defense, diplomatic, and development communities – the 3Ds – to work in concert together forging stability and development in Afghanistan’s provinces.³⁰ The introduction of the PRTs was a US-inspired effort to win the “hearts and minds” of the Afghan population, particularly the Pashtuns.³¹

There was much initial optimism when the PRTs were created. US Army LTG John R. Vines, who commanded Coalition forces in Afghanistan from September 2002 to

October 2003, heavily praised the creation of the PRTs in April 2004. He credited the creation of the PRT concept to his predecessor in Afghanistan, LTG Dan McNeil, and called it "a stroke of near genius" because of the quick impact it was designed to have to boost the quality of life for the Afghans. LTG Vines was particularly optimistic because PRTs often provided services the Afghans in villages never enjoyed before, such as electricity.

The PRT is one of two primary types of teams in the non-kinetic arsenal of COIN. The other is the Human Terrain Team (HTT), which is a team of experienced officers, non-commissioned officers, and civilian social scientists trained and skilled in cultural data research and analysis to provide military and civilian leaders with information about the people, culture, and social dynamics of Afghan groups.³² The Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO), a U.S. Army Training and Doctrine command (TRADOC) organization that supports the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, was charged with developing a broad-based capacity to understand the cultures of strategic interest to US policy makers. The term "human terrain" refers to the human dimension to the COIN and requires a broad anthropological understanding of how Afghan culture works. This is infinitely complicated given the historical isolation of Afghanistan and its rich tapestry of ethnicities and clans.³³ HTT social scientists give military commanders briefings and reports that provide operational information focusing on who are probable friends and enemies and how to approach them.



Figure 6: Human Terrain Team, Basra Province (US Army photo)

US forces unconnected with PRTs and HTTs also train in cultural issues to better understand non-kinetic elements within the COIN.³⁴ To put the doctrine and goals of COIN to practice in Afghanistan, the US Army created a counterinsurgency academy on a former Canadian military base in Kabul in April 2007.³⁵ Stressing the importance of cultural awareness, the 5-day course teaches attendees local customs, culture, ethnic dynamics, and history of the area.³⁶ The course also stresses, if only in a very basic format, the importance of human development in the overall COIN strategy. There is a pronounced diversity of 80-100 students who study at any one time. They range from

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western aid workers and Department of Defense (DoD) civilians to Afghan military and police officers and enlisted men who engage in role playing as well as course work. All the students live, eat, and study together in teams. The goal of the course to give students insights into the human dimensions of the current war in Afghanistan.

COIN, Human Development, and Tomorrow's Afghanistan

US COIN doctrine has changed many times since Black Jack Pershing saw that training public administrators, empowering local police officials, and creating local stakeholders could defeat the insurgents with less blood and greater permanence than purely kinetic efforts. In Afghanistan today, the battle for reconstruction and development will remain the war within the war. The extent to which Afghanistan can be raised from its failing status will heavily determine the success or failure of the COIN. As of fall 2009, the US military is placing a strong emphasis on human development, as well as surging the military capabilities in that theater. Islamic extremist insurgents are threatening to destroy the stability that Afghanistan briefly enjoyed several years ago. The insurgents are resurgent, highly motivated, ruthless, and relatively well financed.



Figure 6: Class Picture of US, German and French Students at the Afghanistan Counterinsurgency Academy with a former king's palace in the background, July 2008. (Author photo)

For these reasons, Afghanistan will remain a test-bed for the COIN doctrine that emphasizes nation building through human development. It is the goal of the Afghan government and its allies to expand the choices to the Afghan people and to give them greater peace and prosperity. Their efforts could be considered successful if Afghans begin to live longer, healthier lives; have substantially greater access to education and

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health facilities and enjoy security; and begin to enjoy a higher standard of living. If these human development fundamentals are widely distributed, there could be a generation of stakeholders in Afghanistan's future who will find the Taliban alternatives very unattractive. If this happens, the insurgency will have been defeated by human development. If this happens, the insurgency in Afghanistan will be over.

Endnotes

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¹⁷ The Philippines Insurrection was long, bloody, and often morbid. Reports of US soldiers humiliating and brutalizing Filipinos led to Congressional investigations.

¹⁸ Daly, "Classical Principles of Counterinsurgency," 53-57.

¹⁹ Hemingway, "CORDS: 'Winning Hearts and Minds in Vietnam.'"

²⁰ For a complete list of the doctrine and external sources that contributed to the development of FM 3-24, reference the book's extensive bibliography. A few of the more

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