

# Counterinsurgency Principles for the Diplomat

---

by Kurt Amend

**Kurt Amend** entered the United States Foreign Service in 1988. His overseas assignments have included Afghanistan, India, Kosovo, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Tajikistan. In Washington he has served in the Department of State Operations Center and on the staffs of the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Council. The views expressed herein are his alone and do not reflect the Department of State or U.S. Government policy. An earlier version of this article appeared in *Small Wars Journal*.

*Abstract: The recent resurgence of interest in insurgency and counterinsurgency has revealed a deficit in material written by and for the diplomat, the actor ostensibly responsible for the political component of a counterinsurgency campaign. Classical theorists stress that progress along the political track is essential for ultimate success. Recent commentary, in shedding new light on the characteristics of modern insurgencies, reaffirms this principle. To make political headway the diplomat-counterinsurgent needs to develop a strategic narrative, build a political strategy around the narrative, acquire expertise, become a catalyst for political change, and maximize contact with the local population. In doing so, he will make important contributions to and help accelerate success in a counterinsurgency campaign.*

*“War and diplomacy are different but intimately related aspects of national policy. Diplomats and warriors who recall this will therefore act as brothers in a potentially lethal common endeavor...they will consider together when to fight and when to talk and when to press and when to stop.”*

Chas. W. Freeman, Jr., *The Diplomat's Dictionary* (1995)

*“If the government is strong enough, the Taliban cannot come here. If the government is weak, the people will not support it.”*

Afghan farmer, quoted by Carlotta Gall in “Taliban Make Afghan Stability a Distant Goal,” *The New York Times*, May 22, 2008.

**T**he U.S. government's responses to the challenges of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the concomitant resurgence of interest in the nature of insurgency and counterinsurgency, have led experts to revisit some

of the fundamentals of classical counterinsurgency theory.<sup>1</sup> One of the most enduring precepts is that defeat of an insurgency ultimately will be achieved not through military, but primarily through political means. Counterinsurgency texts stress this view, with scholars and senior military officers reaffirming its basic truth and the principle incorporated into U.S. military doctrine. Improving the security of the local population and gaining the population's support for the government, at its core, is a political process.<sup>2</sup>

Notwithstanding this basic proposition, there is a dearth of material written by and for the diplomat-counterinsurgent. This is surprising since responsibility to achieve political progress in a counterinsurgency presumably rests, to a great extent, on civilian shoulders. Since early 2003 in Afghanistan and 2005 in Iraq, American diplomats have been integral members of combined civil–military groups—Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs)—initially established to promote reconstruction, pursue security sector reform, and help extend central government authority. As the insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq developed, PRT members, civilian and military, assumed significant roles in the implementation of U.S. counterinsurgency strategies. Against this backdrop, the recent proliferation of military journal articles and monographs suggests the military's playbook overflows with tactical, operational, and strategic guidance on what to do in a counterinsurgency and when to do it. No such wealth of doctrine exists, however, for the diplomat.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Insurgency is understood to mean an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through use of subversion and armed conflict. See Joint Chiefs of Staff, Publication 1-02, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, p. 267, [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new\\_pubs/jp1\\_02.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf). Counterinsurgency refers to the full spectrum of military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, intelligence, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency. *Ibid.*, at p. 128. Dr. David Kilcullen, Chief Strategist in the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, defines classical counterinsurgency as the “theory of counter-revolutionary warfare developed in response to the so-called wars of national liberation from 1944 to about 1982.” See David Kilcullen, “Counterinsurgency *Redux*,” *Survival* 48 (Winter 2006–2007), pp. 111–130.

<sup>2</sup> Classic works on counterinsurgency are: David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1964); Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, and Peacekeeping* (St. Petersburg, Fla.: Hailer Publishing, 2005); and Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> There are several notable exceptions. U.S. Department of State officer Dan Green, who from 2005–2006 served as political advisor to the Tarin Kowt Provincial Reconstruction Team, Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan, has developed a number of practical lessons for political officers destined for provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan and Iraq. See “Counterinsurgency Diplomacy: Political Advisors at the Operational and Tactical Levels,” *Military Review*, (May–June 2007), pp. 24–30, and “The Political Officer as Counter-Insurgent: Conducting Tactical Politics Against Insurgencies,” *Small Wars Journal* 9 (September 2007), pp. 1–20, [www.smallwarsjournals.com](http://www.smallwarsjournals.com). Another important contribution is the U.S. Government Inter-agency Counterinsurgency Initiative's *Counterinsurgency for U.S. Government Policy Makers: A Work in Progress*, October 2007 ([www.usgcoin.org](http://www.usgcoin.org)), which acknowledges in its preface the absence of “civilian literature to complement military doctrine.” The guide is an interim draft

This article is designed to help fill this gap. It begins with a survey of classical counterinsurgency theory, the conceptual framework from which current strategies in Afghanistan and Iraq have been drawn and which remains relevant for the civilian-counterinsurgent. The article continues with an overview of current literature, generated to a large extent by developments in Afghanistan and Iraq, which describe important changes in the character of insurgencies in recent years. It then proposes a set of guiding principles for the diplomat-counterinsurgent that seeks to answer the basic question: what should the diplomat's approach be in a counterinsurgency? Finally, the article considers the added complexity of a multinational counterinsurgency and the implications thereof for the diplomat.

Although offering advice for the diplomat, this article is aimed at a wider audience—development officials, intelligence officers, civilian experts, civil affairs officers, and multinational partners—with whom a diplomat will likely collaborate in a counterinsurgency. Unity of effort is a crucial, but often elusive, element of successful counterinsurgency warfare. Misperceptions about roles and missions have the potential to produce organizational arrangements with multiple, conflicting lines of responsibility and authority. By developing a fuller appreciation of how other actors conceive of their responsibilities, the argument here seeks to provide greater clarity about a counterinsurgency campaign.

### **Back to the Classics**

The “small wars” of the last century produced a rich set of lessons on insurgencies and how governments can defeat them.<sup>4</sup> While military thinkers as far back as Sun Tzu have considered the subject of irregular or guerilla war, theorists familiar with and shaped by France's experiences in Indochina and Algeria (1945–1962) and Great Britain's counterinsurgency in Malaya (1948–1960) were largely responsible for developing a number of useful

of an operational level handbook for interagency participants in a counterinsurgency. Sarah Sewall, author of the introduction to *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Manual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), argues forcefully in favor of a national counterinsurgency policy from which civilian and military participants would take their guidance. See Sarah Sewall, “Crafting a Counterinsurgency Doctrine,” *Foreign Service Journal* (September 2007), pp. 33–40.

<sup>4</sup> Small wars are “operations undertaken under executive authority, wherein military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory for the preservation of life and of such interests as are determined by the foreign policy of our Nation.” United States Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual, 1940* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2005). See also Colonel C.E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), pp. 21–22; and Max Boot, *Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

principles to guide policy-makers and practitioners in waging counterinsurgency warfare. Many of the elements of classical theory remain valid, as summarized below.

*Base an insurgency on a cause.* Classical counterinsurgency theory asserts that an insurgent, to achieve his objectives, will adopt a cause upon which to attract supporters from the local population. The appeal of this cause is essential to overcome the insurgent's basic weaknesses vis-à-vis the government: few in number; concerned with problems of financing, recruitment and sufficient arms; and in constant need of sanctuary from which to operate. The counterinsurgent, by comparison, represents the status quo, not a cause or ideology. Thus, for example, the call to evict foreign, infidel invaders from Afghanistan—an appeal so effective during the 1979–1989 Soviet-Afghan War—has held primacy as a cause since the early stages of the current insurgency in Afghanistan. Classical theorists add that, as an insurgency matures, the relevant merits of the cause may fade in importance as the population's "more primitive concern for safety" begins to dominate.<sup>5</sup>

*Win over the local population.* If the insurgent can drive a wedge between the population and the government—that is, if he can get the active support of the former—he will win the war. The central focus of the counterinsurgent, then, is on those measures needed to move support of the population over to his side. It should be stressed that the government is usually at a strategic disadvantage. It is the target of a flexible enemy that can attack at a time and place of its own choosing while the government must defend everywhere. Unlike the insurgent, the government is held accountable for security, basic public services, and the rule of law, and cannot operate in a clandestine manner. To overcome this and other disadvantages, the government needs to identify the segment of the population that is inclined to support the government, the "favorable minority," and mobilize it against the insurgent minority.<sup>6</sup>

Recently, Major Mark Grdovic characterized this fundamental dynamic of a counterinsurgency as a courtroom battle in which lawyers, representing the combatants, attempt to sway the views of the jury, the local population. In Grdovic's view, the confrontation is less a traditional, decisive clash between two opposing armies and more a process of persuasion, played out over time. Grdovic's useful analogy underscores perhaps the most critical, enduring maxim of classical theory: in counterinsurgency, the population decides the outcome.<sup>7</sup>

*Political and military actions are inseparable.* Every action on the part of the counterinsurgent should mobilize this crucial segment of the population toward the government and away from the insurgent. Here, political and

<sup>5</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency*, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> Major Mark Grdovic, "Understanding Counterinsurgency," *Special Warfare* (December 2004), pp. 2–5.

military actions cannot be cleanly divided. According to Frank Kitson, “in the operational sphere civil and military measures are inextricably intertwined.”<sup>8</sup> To cite a current example, in Afghanistan the reliance on air power in support of ground operations has in a number of cases tragically led to civilian casualties. Similarly, there have been reports of NATO forces operating in southern Afghanistan that, once subjected to improvised explosive device attacks, have fired indiscriminately, in some cases killing local Afghans. Each civilian casualty prospectively turns a family, if not an entire village, against the government.<sup>9</sup> In counterinsurgency, every military action needs to be viewed through the prism of its likely political consequences. Conversely, every political action carries with it implications for security.

*Intelligence – the coin of the realm.* The role of reliable intelligence in counterinsurgency is paramount. The most reliable, actionable intelligence will come from the population. High quality intelligence, however, will not come from a population that does not feel safe. And the local population will not feel safe unless the insurgent threat has been largely eliminated. Thus activities designed to secure the population are necessary to restore the allegiance of the population (and marginalize the insurgents), as well as to establish the kind of favorable climate that will produce reliable intelligence.

*Ending an insurgency.* In classical theory, the period during which security improves and leaders emerge from the local population to commit themselves to the government is seen as the tipping point in a counterinsurgency. Victory follows “permanent isolation of the insurgent from the population, isolation not enforced upon the population but maintained by and with the population.”<sup>10</sup> Classical counterinsurgency theorists stress that the population’s support should be considered conditional. If the population is not confident that the government has the ability to win, it will not support the government. If the population believes the government has the will and means to win, it will rally to the government’s side. In this scenario, former insurgents, marginalized and lacking inspiration to continue the fight, eschew violence and pledge loyalty to the government. Life slowly returns to normal.

## **New, Not-so-Small Wars**

The crucibles of Afghanistan and Iraq have sent military theorists and practitioners back to the drawing boards to reevaluate some of the basic tenets

<sup>8</sup> Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations*, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> As a Pakistani diplomat observed, “When a child is killed in a [Pashtun] village, that village is lost for 100 years.” International Crisis Group, “Afghanistan: The Problem of Pashtun Alienation,” *Asia Report*, No. 62 (Kabul: International Crisis Group, August 2003), cited in Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, “No Sign until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier.” *International Security* 32:4 (Spring 2008), p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency*, p. 77.

noted above. This reassessment has generated discussion of new theoretical constructs that might prove successful in contemporary insurgencies. One observer has called this new thinking “neo-classical” counterinsurgency theory.<sup>11</sup>

*Changes in the structure, operations, and location of insurgent groups.* The insurgent groups fighting today are mostly small, dispersed, loosely linked, and transnational. Flattened, often ad hoc, command arrangements have replaced hierarchical, military-like structures of the past. Notwithstanding differences over ideology, tactics or goals, modern insurgent groups may merge or form transitory alliances of convenience with existing criminal organizations. Afghanistan provides a recent example where remnant Taliban, Hezb-i Islami (Gulbuddin), and other local groups have allied themselves with drug traffickers and criminal bands to extract revenue from and otherwise prey upon local residents.

Seeking to exploit the relative cover of densely populated neighborhoods with diverse, transient populations, insurgents can find sanctuary in large urban centers. Some commentators depict the urban environment as “the insurgent and terrorist’s jungle of the twenty-first century.”<sup>12</sup> Insurgents’ use of neighborhoods in Baghdad and, increasingly, Kabul buttress this notion. Methods of attack parallel the establishment of these new bases of operation. Car bombs and suicide attacks predominate, not guerilla ambushes on isolated mountain roads.

*Limited strategies.* Instead of capturing territory or overthrowing the government, the overarching goal of an insurgent group now may be to provoke and exhaust a government to achieve more limited objectives (e.g., discredit the ruling regime, or induce foreign troops to leave the country). Recent reporting from Afghanistan’s Kandahar province, for example, suggests that Taliban forces, through intimidation of local villagers, aim to exert limited, local control to facilitate complicity in the poppy trade.<sup>13</sup> Insurgent attacks may be designed to trigger disproportionate government responses that alienate

<sup>11</sup> See Frank G. Hoffman, “Neo-classical Counterinsurgency?” *Parameters* (Summer 2007), pp. 71–87; David Kilcullen, “Countering Global Insurgency,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 28 (August 2005), pp. 597–617; David Kilcullen, “Counterinsurgency *Redux*”; Steven Metz, *Rethinking Insurgency* (Carlisle, Pa.: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, June 2007), pp. 15–42; Steven Metz, “New Challenges and Old Concepts: Understanding 21<sup>st</sup> Century Insurgency,” *Parameters* (Winter 2007–2008), pp. 20–32; Steven Metz and Raymond Millen, “Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response,” Strategic Studies Institute, November 2004, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ssi/insurgency21c.pdf>; and Insurgency Research Group, “The Virtual Dimension of Modern Insurgency and Counterinsurgency,” <http://insurgencyresearchgroup.wordpress.com>, pp. 1–22.

<sup>12</sup> Hoffman, “Neo-classical Counterinsurgency,” p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Chayes, “Security and Development in Afghanistan: A Reality Check,” Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary, Seminar Series, Briefing Notes, March 31, 2008.

the local population. Such attacks may have the added effect of rattling the nerves of already skittish international audiences supporting troops in a multinational counterinsurgency campaign.

*Dangers of the protracted insurgency.* Insurgencies that immobilize a government, degrade international support, retard economic development, and sow fear among the population arguably represent a far more dangerous strategic threat than those that aspire to take territory and evict a government. Dr. Steven Metz lists some of the more pernicious effects of the protracted insurgency of today: “the destabilization of regions; reduced access to resources and markets; the blossoming of transnational crime; humanitarian disasters; and transnational terrorism.”<sup>14</sup>

*Globalization and its effects.* One of the most profound differences between past and present-day insurgencies lies in the exploitation by insurgent groups of modern information technology. The battlefield is now multi-dimensional, encompassing both physical territory and cyberspace.<sup>15</sup> Experts describe the “virtual sanctuary” that globally-linked, modern computer networks afford.<sup>16</sup> The insurgent uses the internet to generate moral and financial support, recruit personnel, and transmit propaganda to loosely associated cells around the world.<sup>17</sup> Cross border collaboration between insurgent groups occurs in real time.<sup>18</sup> Modern communications also compress the operational level of war. That is, the abundance of actors in the conflict zone of a modern insurgency (non-governmental organizations, media outlets, international organizations, private contractors, coalition partners, and relief agencies) and their ability to communicate instantly means that tactical events or actions take on unexpected strategic meaning.<sup>19</sup>

An example of how the tactical can become strategic occurred in Kabul on May 31, 2006 when a U.S. military cargo truck suffered brake failure and caused a traffic accident that led to the death of six Afghan civilians. Eight hours of demonstrations, rioting and more civilian deaths followed. Public perceptions that the U.S. military fired into unarmed crowds and reports of Afghan police incompetence in subduing the rioting—fueled in both cases by

<sup>14</sup> Metz, *Rethinking Counterinsurgency*, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> To some modern technology has rendered territory important, but no longer decisive, in insurgency and counterinsurgency. See William R. Polk, *Violent Politics: A History of Insurgency, Terrorism & Guerilla War, From the American Revolution to Iraq* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2007), p. 86.

<sup>16</sup> Kilcullen, “Counterinsurgency *Redux*,” p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Elaine Sciolino and Souad Mekhennet, “Al Qaeda Warrior Uses Internet to Rally Women,” *The New York Times*, May 28, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Migration of the vocabulary of insurgency and terrorism – e.g., the Arabic terms *intifada* and *fedayeen* appearing in Afghanistan – bolsters the thesis that insurgent groups in one theater are linked with transnational extremists elsewhere. See Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, “No Sign until the Burst of Fire,” p. 67.

<sup>19</sup> Kilcullen, “Counterinsurgency *Redux*,” 6.

instant media coverage—had clear strategic implications for U.S. military forces and for the Afghan government.

*The need for a strategic, or war, narrative.* Given the virtual dimension's importance in modern insurgency, commentators speak of the need to develop a "strategic narrative"; in essence, a compelling storyline that can "explain events convincingly and from which inferences are drawn."<sup>20</sup> Such a narrative is "the foundation of all strategy, upon which all else—policy, rhetoric, and action—is built."<sup>21</sup> It is the organizing framework for policy, culturally impossible to dismantle or attack, and defines how the war is to be argued and described.<sup>22</sup> Without, it a counterinsurgent cedes the crucial virtual dimension to the enemy as the latter interprets events and tries to shape public thinking through the filter of his narrative.

### **The Diplomat at War: Where to Begin?**

What principles, then, should guide the diplomat in a counterinsurgency? How does a diplomat—outnumbered by the military in the field, lacking significant amounts of program funds, and dependant upon his colleagues in uniform for such basics as mobility and security—effectively pursue the political track, long seen as the decisive component of counterinsurgency?

*Create a strategic narrative.* The diplomat starts by crafting the aforementioned strategic narrative, one that is short, compelling, and culturally unassailable, to explain the purpose of all government actions. It will be used to interpret events all the way down to the tactical level throughout a counterinsurgency. The narrative will appeal directly to the local population and, indirectly, reveal insurgents for what they are: e.g., ruthless, foreign, and lacking any credible plan or capability to improve the lives of local residents. This storyline will be the foundation for subsequent strategy, policy, and action. A strategic narrative for Afghanistan, for example, might read as follows:

U.S. forces came to Afghanistan to evict foreign extremists and help restore the Afghan way of life. Their goal is to help the Afghan people make Afghanistan secure, economically self-sufficient, and free from interference by external powers. They will remain in Afghanistan as long as the Afghan people welcome them and not a day longer.

Given the vital role that the virtual dimension plays in modern counterinsurgency, as noted above, the counterinsurgent cannot afford to concede

<sup>20</sup> Insurgency Research Group, "The Virtual Dimension of Modern Insurgency and Counterinsurgency," <http://insurgencyresearchgroup.wordpress.com>, 5, quoting Lawrence Freedman, King's College London Professor of War.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, quoting Professor Michael Vlahos, Johns Hopkins University.

<sup>22</sup> Kilcullen, "Counterinsurgency *Redux*," pp. 111 – 130.

the narrative to the insurgent. The counterinsurgent needs his own powerful, strategic account.

*Develop a political strategy aimed at winning the active support of the local population.* Next, on the basis of a strategic narrative, the diplomat should draw up a political strategy. The purpose of a political strategy is to detail the range of political, military, and development actions that will help the government secure, and maintain, the support of the population. It contains long-term objectives, underlying assumptions, and specific measures for achieving objectives. It should be developed in close coordination with military, development, intelligence, non-government organization (NGO), host government, and multinational partners. Any political strategy lacking the contributions and support of key stakeholders is doomed to failure.

The strategy should be integrated and comprehensive. It should leverage all available tools of power—local, national and international; military, political, economic, intelligence, informational. It should identify objectives at the village, district, and provincial levels. Objectives and actions should be placed against a timeline. Measurements of performance should be defined. Periodic reviews of performance should be conducted and actions recalibrated accordingly.

If an integrated, comprehensive political strategy already exists, the diplomat—upon arrival and with the benefit of fresh insight—should reappraise the plan. Is there a forceful, underlying narrative? Are the working assumptions still valid? Do the guiding principles need to be revisited? What progress and/or new challenges need to be accounted for? Should effort be redirected to reflect a change in resources? Is performance being accurately measured, and what do the results indicate?

Development of a political strategy will likely necessitate a systematic analysis, down to the village level, of a host of issues. Some of the questions that will need to be answered are: What are the local power structures and on what basis (e.g., tribal, ethnic) are they organized? Which groups within the population are supportive of the government? Which groups are supportive of (or, more likely, are unable to challenge) the insurgents? What political, economic, or security activities are likely to shift support of “the favorable minority” of the local population to the government’s side? How can contested areas be made secure? Within the various tiers of leadership, who are the fence sitters and how can they be won over? Who are the spoilers, and with what incentives and disincentives can they be marginalized?

The diplomat should begin to assemble the principal components of a political strategy while preparing to assume his new responsibilities. Once in the field the diplomat should consult extensively with fellow counterinsurgents (recognizing that some, like certain non-governmental and international organizations, will not see themselves as such), move as briskly as possible through the analytical process suggested above, and fill out the strategy in light of ground realities. In areas where security is not the paramount issue—for

example, in Afghanistan's Panjshir Valley, where a U.S.-led PRT was established in 2005—military operations will likely be deemphasized in the political strategy. In areas where security is a principal concern—in Afghanistan's southern Helmand Province, for example—the blend of military, political, and development actions will look different. Once the strategy is finalized the diplomat will have an effective game plan with which to guide his efforts to shift popular support to the government and away from the insurgent.

In every aspect the political strategy should belong to the host government and be consistent with and promote national political, development and security goals. Conflicting or competing strategies—ours, the host government's, or a multinational partner's—should be avoided. Further, as the government continues to build capacity in key areas (e.g., security forces, governance, or other basic government functions), the political strategy should focus on how local governments can improve and deliver essential services to the population. In other words, while implementing a comprehensive political strategy to win the population's support, a diplomat needs to anticipate a diminution in his responsibilities. Foreign civilian and military assistance will, as government capacity improves, change. Programs or activities that more effectively enable local governments and thereby ease this transition should be incorporated into the political strategy.

Perhaps most important of all, the diplomat should work to ensure that every activity of every participant in a counterinsurgency—military, diplomatic, development, intelligence, NGO, host government—is linked to achieving political progress. No action should be undertaken in a counterinsurgency if it does not somehow support the campaign's overarching political goals. For the diplomat, this is the heart of the matter. If programs or activities have deleterious political consequences, they should be reconsidered if not outright discontinued.

For a time in 2004 in Afghanistan, for example, U.S.-funded alternative livelihood programs for poppy farmers employed expatriate consultants in certain southern provinces. Episodic attacks by insurgent groups forced foreign staff to return to Kabul where they would remain, still under contract and earning per diem payments, until conditions in the provinces improved. While the security concerns were real, the negative political implications of this yo-yo like movement of foreign advisors—as a result of which program funds paid for restaurant and hotel bills and not activities to help Afghan farmers develop licit sources of revenue—were profound. Again, if a counterinsurgent's action does not support the political strategy, it should be re-examined.

This is, to be sure, easier said than done. Bureaucratic “lanes” tend to be sharply demarcated. It is difficult to imagine any military commander responding warmly to perceived civilian intrusion into his operational planning process. Intelligence officers, nurtured in a need-to-know environment, may reflexively conclude that the diplomat indeed has no need to know. Here it is incumbent upon the diplomat to ensure that his military and civilian

colleagues understand his motives and the broader goals of the political strategy. By stressing the strategic narrative, by explaining the various pillars of the political action plan, and through a process of close collaboration, the diplomat should help fellow counterinsurgents see the desirability of aligning their activities with the overarching political goals. The underlying principle of classical counterinsurgency theory still applies: politics and security (the civil and military tracks) are inextricably linked, and must be considered together.

*Acquire expertise.* A diplomat's effectiveness in counterinsurgency will be a direct function of how much he knows about his area of responsibility and how much that knowledge informs his judgment on a range of issues. While this risks stating the obvious, it cannot be emphasized forcefully enough. Over seventy years ago T.E. Lawrence, in his distillation of lessons for waging an effective insurgency, recommended as much when he wrote, "Learn all you can about your *Ashraf* and *Bedu*. Get to know their families, clans and tribes, friends and enemies, wells, hills and roads."<sup>23</sup> If the diplomat is successful in this regard, over time other counterinsurgents—both civilian and military—will view the diplomat's expertise as indispensable. They will want him along on a patrol in a remote village where recent intelligence indicates that insurgent recruitment drives are gaining traction. They will pull him into the room when concluding a micro-credit financing scheme for local entrepreneurs. But first the diplomat must learn as much as possible about the people, history, politics, and economics where he will serve.

Possible lines of inquiry to assist in this effort include the following:

- *People*—What is the population of the province or region, and how is it broken down by gender and age? What are the population growth, birth, and death rates? What are the infant mortality and fertility rates? What are the major infectious diseases? What is the literacy rate?
- *Religious and ethnic groups, major tribes, clans, sub-clans, and extended families*—What are the relationships and histories between the groups? What long-standing feuds exist, and why? To what extent have groups inter-married and what political affiliations have developed as a result? What is the history of support of the various groups for the central government? Which groups have sent their youth to serve in the army or other national security forces?
- *Geography*—How much land is arable? How much is irrigated? What are the natural fresh water sources and are they disputed? What other natural resources exist in the province or region? Are they capable of extraction for commercial purposes?

<sup>23</sup> T. E. Lawrence, "The 27 Lessons of T.E. Lawrence," *The Arab Bulletin*, August 20, 1917.

- *Local leadership and governance*—At the village, district, and provincial levels, who are the influential leaders—political, religious, tribal, or other? Who are their principal constituencies—that is, what are their sources of power? How effective are they in responding to the needs of the local population? How might they become more effective? Are local leaders supportive of the central government? If there is historical antipathy toward the central government, do sub-national structures (e.g., tribal councils) exist for the purposes of governing or dispute resolution?
- *Local economy*—What are the principal sources of income—legal and illegal—for the local population? What are the main agricultural products grown in the province? Do small-scale industries exist? What is the local unemployment rate? What percentage of the working population goes abroad to find employment? How much do they remit home each year?
- *Public services*—What percentage of the population has reliable electricity and potable water? How is garbage picked up? How is sewage removed? Where do people obtain health care? What is the quality of the health care? What percentages of school age children, broken down by gender, attend school?

The diplomat's expertise should extend to knowledge about the enemy, as well. A clear understanding of which insurgent groups are operating in a given province—information about their leadership, goals, power base, means of recruitment, financing sources, and foreign supporters—will help the diplomat-counterinsurgent calibrate a comprehensive political strategy in important ways. With this knowledge he can identify political actions that will exploit fissures within a group and induce defections to the government. Detailed knowledge of the enemy should provide insights into ways to advance the disarmament and reconciliation process and bring a more rapid end to the violence.

By steeping oneself in the history, politics, and everyday minutiae of a province, the diplomat will develop insights that contribute positively to the counterinsurgency campaign. In this sense, and to borrow a military term, the diplomat's deep knowledge and sound judgment will become powerful “force multipliers” in the overall effort.

*Become a catalyst for political progress.* To succeed in counterinsurgency warfare, a diplomat will need to rethink traditional methods and be prepared to assume a variety of new roles, some completely novel. Consistent with the political strategy, he will need to mentor host government officials on ways to enhance the efficiency of their administration. In an Afghanistan or Iraq context, he may be asked about long-standing property disputes between tribes that have delayed agreement on a proposed development scheme. He will review project proposals with development officers and may help

negotiate the terms with local contractors. He will assess the strengths and weakness of local security and intelligence officials and make recommendations to senior government figures about personnel changes that support political strategy. He will receive petitions from villagers seeking the release of a fellow tribesman unjustly held, to their thinking, by government security forces.

Thus, in a counterinsurgency the diplomat will be called to act as mentor, tribal affairs advisor, program officer, negotiator, analytic reporting officer, and, not least, envoy. The challenge of assuming new roles is elevated to an altogether higher level in counterinsurgency since it occurs in the middle of a live, lethal conflict. Far from pursuing *post-conflict* reconstruction and stability (a misnomer, to the author's thinking, in the context of a counterinsurgency), the diplomat-counterinsurgent will be conducting *mid-conflict* mentoring, program formulation, negotiation, reporting, and advocacy. As an Australian army officer recently put it, it will be nothing short of "contested nation-building."<sup>24</sup> The diplomat will not have the luxury of waiting for security conditions to improve. The need to identify and mobilize the favorable minority against the insurgents will be immediate. To improve his chances for success, he will want to adopt an active, enabling approach with provincial administrators and local leaders. He will need to see himself as a catalyst for political progress, an agent for positive change.<sup>25</sup>

*Maximize contact with the local population.* Armed with a comprehensive political strategy, fluent in the history and workings of a province, and inclined to help shape desired political outcomes, the diplomat's effectiveness will improve by spending every possible waking hour with local leaders, officials, and residents. In many traditional societies, personal relationships hold the key to getting business done. Making the effort to build relation-

<sup>24</sup> Colonel John Frewen, "Contested Nation-building: The Challenge of Countering Insurgency in Afghanistan, 2007," *Australian Army Journal* V.1, Autumn 2008, pp.19–37.

<sup>25</sup> The prospective assumption of multiple new diplomatic tasks apparently discomfits some. See, for example, Steve Kashkett, "In Defense of 'Traditional' Diplomacy," *Foreign Service Journal*, April 2008, p. 53. "Traditional diplomacy"—which Kashkett defines as managing bilateral relationships, dealing with global issues, adjudicating visas, preparing congressionally-mandated reports, and explaining the United States to the world—will remain the diplomat's central focus and "the key to our success in an often hostile world." Yet national security challenges change and presumably so should diplomatic priorities, structures, and responses. "Our success" aside, the diplomat's *relevance* increasingly will depend on his ability to contribute meaningfully to complex civilian-military undertakings like a counterinsurgency. Rethinking the diplomat's responsibilities is consistent with a broader vision for the future of the Department of State as articulated by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice during a speech at Georgetown University on January 18, 2006. The text of the speech is available at: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/59306.htm>. See also Kennon H. Nakamura and Susan B. Epstein, "Diplomacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Transformational Diplomacy," *CRS Report for Congress* (August 23, 2007); and George L. Argyros, Marc Grossman, and Felix G. Rohatyn, *The Embassy of the Future*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 15, 2007.

ships—sitting for long hours, drinking green tea or *qawa*, and simply listening—will make a profound difference. At the same time it is a question of numbers. A given province or region will likely have thousands of troops but only one diplomat. To achieve progress on the political track the lone diplomat will need to circulate widely and aggressively.

On occasion, the imperative to maximize contact with the local population will collide headlong with a bureaucratic predisposition to secure the diplomat in hardened facilities, well away from threat. Yet the diplomat-counterinsurgent who remains ensconced in a small U.S. fortress, relying on regularly scheduled meetings “outside the wire,” will not reach his full potential within the broader counterinsurgency campaign. Instead, every effort should be made to take overnight, circuit-riding trips through districts. The diplomat should look for ways to leverage military presence in remote areas to reach groups important to the political strategy.<sup>26</sup> District administrators, local religious leaders, and village elders should know the diplomat and welcome his arrival. The diplomat-counterinsurgent should strive for what T.E. Lawrence recommended in 1917: “Your ideal position is when you are present and not noticed.”<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the diplomat should be at home among the local population whose support is vital to successful counterinsurgency warfare.

### **The Challenges of a Multinational Counterinsurgency Campaign**

The complexity of the diplomat’s assignment is compounded when the counterinsurgency campaign takes on a multinational character.<sup>28</sup> Thorny issues relating to legal mandate, leadership, political authority, decision-making, military command, and information-sharing intrude. A more fundamental predicament exists if multinational participants are not in basic agreement on the nature of the insurgency and the appropriate components and

<sup>26</sup> See Ann Marlowe, “A Counterinsurgency Grows in Khost,” *The Weekly Standard*, May 19, 2008, for a description of the military’s effective use of “force protection facilities”—twenty to thirty men outposts in district centers—in Khost Province, Afghanistan.

<sup>27</sup> T.E. Lawrence, “The 27 Lessons of T.E. Lawrence.”

<sup>28</sup> For recent contributions by non-U.S. commentators, see Alexander Anderson, “US COIN Doctrine and Practice: An Ally’s Perspective,” *Parameters* (Winter 2007 – 2008), pp. 33–45; Captain Nils N. French, “Learning from the Seven Soviet Wars: Lessons for Canada in Afghanistan,” *Canadian Army Journal* 10.4 (Winter 2008), pp. 36–47; Timo Noetzel and Benjamin Schreer, “The German Army and Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan,” *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, February 2008, pp. 1–4; Mick Ryan, “The Military and Reconstruction Operations,” *Parameters*, (Winter 2007–2008), pp. 58–70; Lieutenant Colonel Michel-Henri St-Louis, “A Comprehensive Approach to Stability: The Strategic Advisory Team in Afghanistan,” *Canadian Army Journal* 10.4 (Winter 2008), pp. 48–57; and David Ucko, “Innovation or Inertia: The U.S. Military and the Learning of Counterinsurgency,” *Orbis*, Spring 2008, pp. 290–310.

direction of the counterinsurgency campaign. As Kitson notes, “it is unlikely that the actual operations which [a multinational arrangement] subsequently carried out would be of much value unless the various contingents had some common understanding of the military problems concerned in fighting insurgents.”<sup>29</sup>

NATO’s assumption of increasing security responsibilities in Afghanistan is replete with examples of such challenges. While some forty countries are increasingly vested in a successful outcome in Afghanistan, sharp divisions over NATO’s military role in economic development, stovepipe civilian and military decision-making arrangements, and a more fundamental disconnect regarding the nature of Afghanistan’s counterinsurgency hamper multilateral efforts. To improve NATO’s performance, these and other more vexing problems will need to be resolved at senior political levels, far removed from the battlefield. Indeed, NATO’s adoption in April 2008 of a comprehensive political-military plan is a welcome step in this direction.

Still, the diplomat in the field can do his share. As suggested above, he should collaborate with multinational partners in developing a comprehensive political strategy. There needs to be a clear understanding at the level of implementation on the nature of the insurgency and the most effective means to defeat it. This process at a minimum should dispel a frequently held notion that offensive security operations are the central pillar of the overall political strategy. To the contrary, working the politics—in combination with a range of other, non-military activities—is the main thrust. Perhaps more importantly, the diplomat’s partnership with others will provide the opportunity to incorporate innovative, non-U.S. approaches to good governance, development, and security.

Next, and given some multinational partners’ insistence on maintaining sharp divides between civilian and military worlds, the diplomat should encourage the establishment and use of appropriate decision making bodies that pursue a comprehensive, civil–military approach. The most sensible way to accomplish this is to have both soldiers and civilians in the same room and members of the same “consultative machinery,” mirroring institutional arrangements in place at the national or international level.<sup>30</sup> Because resistance to melding civilian and military plans and programs sometimes will be entrenched, a diplomat will need to be patient and creative.

Finally, when working with multinational partners the diplomat’s principal focus should remain on maximizing contact with the local population. “Liaison work” between the multinational partner and the United States Government, while a necessary task, should not eclipse the diplomat’s principal mission which is to connect with the local population and in doing so help the government win the people’s support.

<sup>29</sup> Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations*, p. 61.

<sup>30</sup> Dobbins, et al., “*Beginner’s Guide to Nation-building*,” pp. 10–12.

## Concluding Thoughts

The diplomat with a sound strategy, thoroughly versed on the people and politics of a province, enabling others toward improved governance, and in constant contact with the local population can make significant contributions to a combined counterinsurgency campaign. Building on languages and regional experience, the diplomat will apply many of the skills that he has developed over the years: an ability to operate effectively in a difficult, foreign environment; powers of persuasion and negotiation; the capacity to decipher the various shadings of meanings conveyed by foreigner interlocutors, and a facility to advance government policies and programs.

Some may say that such a hybrid diplomat-warrior with academic mastery of arcane subjects, proven war-time experience, and near super-human capacity, is a mythical figure that simply does not exist. But such criticism misses the mark. In proposing principles for the diplomat in a counterinsurgency it is understood that the U.S. government's capabilities in this regard are nascent. Systematic development of a seasoned cadre of diplomat-counterinsurgents will take time and, more importantly, require difficult policy decisions that fall outside the scope of this article. Rather, the above guidelines should be seen as instruments in a tool box from which the diplomat may choose. They are approaches to enhance a diplomat's effectiveness, approaches that can be embraced now and with little cost.

The diplomatic methods suggested above are not without precedent. Forty years ago American diplomats were integral members of combined civilian–military teams that pursued rural pacification and development in Vietnam. While historians will continue to dispute the overall success of the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program and its effect on the outcome of the Vietnam War, few dispute the proposition that, where effectively implemented, the CORDS program led to a diminution in insurgent violence.<sup>31</sup> American diplomats have done this before, successfully so, and they can once again.

Finally, in surveying extant theories of counterinsurgency warfare and proposing a set of guiding principles for the diplomat, this commentary reflects the fundamental belief that, if the United States is to achieve victory in Afghanistan, Iraq, and similar, future conflicts, it is essential that civilians become as conversant with the fundamentals of counterinsurgency warfare as is the military. Indeed, as the U.S. Government Interagency Counterinsurgency

<sup>31</sup> Dr. Jacob Kipp, Lieutenant Colonel Lester W. Grau, and Lieutenant Colonel Karl Prinslow, and Captain Don Smith, "The Human Terrain System: A CORDS for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *Military Review* (September–October 2006), pp. 8 – 15. See also John A. Nagl, "Counterinsurgency in Vietnam: American Organizational Culture and Learning," in Marston and Malkasian, eds., *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, p. 141; and Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism in Vietnam* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), p. 49.

## Counterinsurgency Principles for the Diplomat

Initiative admits, there is a need to move beyond mere understanding and develop civilian doctrine that complements military thinking. Failure to undertake this admittedly difficult task will reduce the diplomat's effectiveness and diminish the likelihood that the U.S. government will achieve its long-term national security objectives. As diplomats, we can afford neither.

