



DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND TOOLS IN CONFLICT ENVIRONMENTS

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03 August 2015

1 Introduction

For at least a generation, conflict resolution has been predominantly the domain of international development practitioners seeking to use their skills and tools to avert war and reduce the suffering of civilian populations. More recently, the U.S. military added similar exercises to its planning efforts, primarily for the strategic purpose of reducing its own potential future deployments around the world. Working occasionally in parallel and at other times seemingly at cross-purposes, the military, donors and non-governmental organizations have begrudgingly come to accept that in any given crisis each can play a role. The nature and extent of each actor's role depends on the circumstances and the severity of the situation.

As the military concludes the longest war in U.S. history in Afghanistan, and as pressure mounts to intervene in additional conflicts in the Middle East, it is worth examining what role development can play in reducing that pressure, who should be responsible for providing that assistance, and what form it should take. In most cases, whether in a pre-conflict environment, an active conflict, or a post-conflict phase, development agencies and their partners are well placed to provide warnings and respond to civilian crises, though not without coordinating and collaborating in certain instances with their military counterparts.

2 Pre-conflict: Development as a Prevention Tool

In 2006, at a time when the U.S. military was engaged in full-scale combat in both Afghanistan and Iraq, General Charles F. Wald, Deputy Commander of the U.S. European Command, wrote an article entitled "The Phase Zero Campaign." The goal of the campaign, which focused on "terrorism's long-term, underlying conditions," was to "prevent conflicts from developing in the first place."¹ In coordination with other U.S. government agencies – the article mentions the Department of State and the Department of Energy, but not the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) – the preventative approach taken by the military focused on greater military training with partner nations and "hearts and minds" communications initiatives to counter extremist ideology.

Around the same time, however, several current and former military and defense officials, including then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and retired General and former Secretary of State General Colin Powell, questioned whether the military should be engaging in traditional civilian-led activities. Recommendations on how to limit military involvement in a pre-conflict phase included guidance that "Phase Zero should only be applied in a linear, progressive manner once a military campaign commences."²

Similarly, the development community expressed alarm at interventions that would be "likely to reflect U.S. military priorities and give short shrift to broader political and developmental considerations" because "DoD's primary concern in weak and failing states is to build the capacity of local security forces. Whether those forces are under effective and accountable civilian control is a secondary concern."³ Another reason for discomfort with military involve-

¹General Charles F. Wald, "New Thinking at USEUCOM: The Phase Zero Campaign," *Joint Force Quarterly* no. 43, (4th quarter 2006): 72-76.

²Colonel Thomas M. Rhatigan, "Redefining Security Cooperation: New Limits on Phase Zero and 'Shaping,'" in *Short of General War: Perspectives on the Use of Military Power in the 21st Century*, edited by Dr. Harry R Yarger, pp. 111-130.

³Colonel Thomas M. Rhatigan, "Redefining Security Cooperation: New Limits on Phase Zero and 'Shaping,'" in *Short of General War: Perspectives on the Use of Military Power in the 21st Century*, edited by Dr. Harry R Yarger, pp. 111-130.

ment in the pre-conflict phase is that the development community has its own experience with early warning mechanisms for identifying potential conflict.

Conflict early warning systems in the development field date at least to the early 1990s, when the end of the Cold War led to relatively unpredictable outbreaks of violence, most notably the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. In late 2013, USAID released a report entitled “Advancing Early Warning of Mass Atrocities against Civilians” in which it laid out a spectrum of approaches for responding to threats depending on how quickly they were likely to occur. Traditionally, more immediate threats – ranging from imminent to the next 12 months – have been addressed by the security sector. The report identifies hot spots, potential triggers, and troop deployments in the context of ongoing armed conflicts as a way to head off attacks against civilians or respond to such conflicts should there be an outbreak of violence.

For longer-term assessments on the likelihood of atrocities being committed against populations within a few years, the report identified statistical models, largely comprised of societal indicators (e.g., wealth, ethnic divisions, regime type), as key tools in helping to determine the likelihood of future violence. Over the years, many quantitative and qualitative analyses have been done to incorporate lessons learned from previous events and support forward-looking policy and planning. However, in addition to this empirical work, development practitioners are also well placed to interpret warning signals on the ground and provide solutions.

In Colombia, for example, despite a pronounced reduction in insurgent violence in recent years, many communities still suffer from severe insecurity, massive displacement, and weak government institutions. To help combat these threats and warn against recurrences of instability, USAID has worked with indigenous leaders to create community-run self-protection networks. These networks allow indigenous communities to police their own populations, while also integrating with government administered protection mechanisms. More broadly, USAID has also worked to promote a culture of respect for human rights through its support of the Colombian government’s National Ombudsman’s Early Warning System. The Ombudsman’s office established and operates a mobile registration unit for victims of human rights violations.

In addition to the formal mechanisms being employed to provide redress in Colombia, the development community’s insight into the pulse of communities as tensions rise is a valuable first step in heading off potential conflict. In Lebanon, the legacy of the 15-year civil war and decades of community-level violence has honed a sense of when and how political, religious, or social divisions can flare into full scale conflict. Using their experience on the ground, local development practitioners were among the first to realize that the influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon could enflame social tensions within host communities. To help promote social cohesion and mitigate these tensions, in 2013 USAID project teams in the northern border area and in the Beqaa Valley supported local civil society activities that enabled people to come together to challenge the rhetoric of sectarianism and violence. Project beneficiaries – Shiites, Sunnis, and Christians – worked together to reclaim public space and collectively identify community priorities and solutions to address the economic and resource strain brought on by the crisis.

Food insecurity is another heavily debated conflict trigger. Regardless of whether a lack of food supply is considered a cause or a consequence of conflict, there is no doubt that heeding warning signs of impending food shortages can help mitigate impending humanitarian crises that can be exploited by extremist groups and lead to further violence. While military units frequently lead or heavily support civilian-led efforts to deliver humanitarian assistance, USAID’s Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) starts at an earlier phase in an impending crisis. FEWS NET manages food security information networks and builds

local capacity for information generation and dissemination in more than 30 countries. These reports assist decision makers and planners in preventing hunger-related deaths, mitigating food insecurity, and strengthening livelihoods. FEWS NET also contributes to conflict early warning by providing local communities with objective and usable data on livelihood changes that can contribute to alleviating conflict-promoting factors such as resource scarcities and lost employment opportunities.

3 Post-conflict: Tools for Reconciliation and/or the Prevention of Reemergence of Violence

The interventions previously mentioned come with the advantage of being employed without “boots on the ground.” As I describe below, avoiding active military involvement in a conflict is not always realistic or even desirable. But in an effort to avoid the outbreak of violence, as well as in the aftermath of a conflict that does not include external military intervention, having a civilian face on international intervention can buy a lot of credibility among local actors on all sides. This credibility offers an opportunity to provide immediate transition assistance as well as longer term support to improving livelihoods.

Following a controversial presidential election in Kenya in December 2007, the announcement that President Mwai Kibaki had won a second term resulted in violence that left 1,300 people dead and more than 350,000 displaced.⁴ Protests that were brutally suppressed by security forces largely divided the country along ethnic lines. Once the rival political parties reached a peace accord and a power sharing agreement in February 2008, USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) helped reduce the political tension by mobilizing citizens’ participation around a national identity and political party platforms, rather than ethnic identities. In response to similar violence following the November 2010 presidential elections in the Ivory Coast, OTI helped strengthen public confidence in the recovery process by enhancing the capacity of community leaders and the responsiveness of governing institutions to address grievances.

Not to be mistaken with full-fledged conflict-resolution initiatives, the goals of these interventions were limited by design and meant to capitalize on windows of opportunity to address targeted political transition and stabilization needs, thus setting the stage for long-term development. An advantage of using these mechanisms in such a politically charged environment is that the U.S. government can provide on the ground assistance without bringing attention to its role in encouraging a locally driven solution. Unlike more high profile development assistance, the U.S. government in these cases often avoids taking credit or making its presence known when trying to help shore up such fragile social or political dynamics. This contrasts with even the most benign humanitarian assistance provided by the U.S. military, which usually comes with a bigger footprint and armed soldiers in uniform, making their presence unmistakable. Of course, there are also circumstances when sending the message that the United States is providing assistance in a post-conflict environment can be advantageous in realizing the benefits of peace and improving livelihoods.

Furthermore, the success of post-conflict security operations often necessitates concurrent development-focused programs. Because violence makes news, most of the attention that follows a conflict focuses on security sector training and equipping. National armies and

⁴“Post Election Violence Humanitarian Assistance.” Kenya Red Cross, https://kenyaredcross.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=284&Itemid=156 (accessed April 24, 2015).

local police usually get new uniforms, new gear, and a steady paycheck. But civilians living in the communities that violence has torn apart often complain more about corrupt or non-existent governance than about threats to physical safety. Establishing accountable municipal and national governments that provide essential constituent services and increased economic opportunity is an effective way to combat the reemergence of more extremist ideologies aimed at maintaining enflamed levels of unrest. For this reason, sustained development programs in post-conflict countries often pair service delivery programs with economic growth programs. Across the Balkans and the Middle East, projects focused on public sector budgeting, financial management, and administering capital improvement projects have been able to demonstrate visible results to constituents who now advocate on their own behalf and expect results from elected officials.

Although the aforementioned examples are not easy to implement, and their success is far from guaranteed, they are meaningful steps that can be taken to mitigate the risk factors that lead to conflict or reduce the likelihood of conflict reemerging. However, in the most egregious cases, they cannot prevent conflict.

4 Conflict-Affected Development: Pockets of Opportunity in an Ongoing Conflict

When fighting starts, a kinetic response is often the only way to create enough space to implement civilian-led programs. The challenge to getting this right, however, is knowing how to correctly sequence the military and civilian interventions. During the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, victory on the battlefield and a full spectrum of political and economic development programs were pursued simultaneously. Throughout both countries, civilian and military teams worked side by side in units known as Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs).

As I have written elsewhere,⁵ while PRTs made sense logistically and practically — by providing development practitioners with access to areas accessible only by the military — the ambiguity between military and civilian engagement was problematic on multiple levels. At the local level, the trust that development professionals gained by working with Afghan and Iraqi professionals and beneficiaries eroded when they were seen as an extension of the military. Likewise, including development success as a factor in “winning the war” created an impression among congressional overseers that military success and development could be measured according to the same standards. Development results are never as clearly defined in time or scope as outcomes on the battlefield.

For the military, removing the enemy and providing a secure environment that enables a provincial government to deliver basic services represents a short-term win that elicits further funding to replicate that success elsewhere. Economic growth and accountable governance, however, cannot be measured in terms of immediate impact. Development assistance in Afghanistan has created numerous jobs⁶ and has trained Afghan farmers how to vaccinate livestock and strengthen local agricultural value chains across the country.⁷ This assistance

⁵Todd Diamond, “Do the Military and Development Mix?” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, March 18, 2010, http://fpif.org/do_the_military_and_development_mix/ (accessed April 24, 2015).

⁶Individual donor projects report on job creation among the outcomes measured under their grants or contracts. See “Agriculture, Rural Investment and Enterprise Strengthening (ARIES) Program in Afghanistan Final Report, September 30, 2006-December 31, 2009,” United States Agency for International Development, 7, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdacq819.pdf (accessed April 24, 2015).

⁷See “Final Performance Evaluation Accelerating Sustainable Agriculture Program (ASAP),” United States Agency for International Development, 150, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdact903.pdf (accessed April 24,

also helped facilitate the 2011 Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement.⁸ While the effects of these activities on gross domestic product might not yet be apparent, these projects are helping to increase household incomes in real terms.⁹

As for the development of accountable governments, despite heavy fighting across southern Afghanistan in 2011, multiple municipalities, supported with international assistance, introduced integrated financial management systems that transparently managed revenue collection, budgeting, expenditures, and automated payrolls. Many of these municipalities also established advisory boards and citizen service desks to increase the visibility, demand, and accountability for public services. In Kabul, the public began buying into the value of gas taxes and vehicle registration fees. There, and in other cities, municipal governments were able to use increased revenue from fees to improve solid waste management and other services. Similar efforts in the Iraqi province of Diyala, which is equally divided among Shites, Sunnis, and Kurds, led to approved budgets and provincial capital improvement plans that have given residents a belief in the possibility of credible governance in the face of the brutal campaign being waged by the Islamic State in neighboring provinces.¹⁰

These modest steps would have been much harder to achieve without a military presence providing support. The consequence of trying to introduce a similar approach without military support has played out in Libya in recent months, where expatriate civilians have been forced to withdraw to neighboring countries for security reasons. In Syria, the United States is trying to provide assistance to local councils in regions of the country controlled by the moderate opposition, but in some cases schools are getting bombed before the assistance can reach them.

5 Policy Recommendations

Civilians and soldiers will inevitably continue to co-mingle in euphemistically named battle spaces for the foreseeable future. The point here is not to advocate for, or against, military intervention, nor to argue whether civilian or military imperatives should take the lead. The point is to recognize when and where civilians are better placed to provide meaningful development assistance and when a focus on stability operations or security sector reform should take precedence. Often this distinction depends on the nature of the threat. Whether in a pre-conflict phase or in the aftermath of war, in many fragile states a harbinger for further violence is just as likely to be a dramatic increase in the price of fuel or staple food products as it is increased troop movements. Recognizing this distinction enables policy planners to call on the most appropriate tools to help defuse the crisis. Once the fighting starts, however, development practitioners must realize that pursuing initiatives intended to improve war-torn livelihoods can make them party to the conflict, and as such a military solution may be required to achieve well-meaning outcomes that have a lasting impact.

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⁸See “Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA),” Afghanistan Customs Department, October 28, 2010, <http://customs.mof.gov.af/en/page/1007/1009/1010> (accessed April 24, 2015). For USAID assistance in negotiating the agreement, see “Trade and Accession Facilitation for Afghanistan (TAF),” United States Agency for International Development, September 30, 2013, <http://www.usaid.gov/news-information/fact-sheets/trade-and-accession-facilitation-afghanistan-tafa> (accessed April 24, 2015).

⁹For example, see “Evaluation Report for Alternative Development Program (ADP) Eastern Region by USAID in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,” United States Agency for International Development, 38-43, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdacs234.pdf (accessed April 24, 2015).

¹⁰For example, see “Evaluation Report for Alternative Development Program (ADP) Eastern Region by USAID in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,” United States Agency for International Development, 38-43, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdacs234.pdf (accessed April 24, 2015).

The leverage that non-military actors bring to the exercise of national power was recognized in 2010 with the release of the first Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, which states at the outset that, “to advance American security, prosperity, and values and to lead other nations in solving shared problems in the 21st century, we must lead through civilian power.”¹¹ In an era of constant, but usually non-existential irregular threats, unpredictability will largely be the rule. At the same time, with its experience operating in many of the recent conflict-affected environments, the development community has become well versed in the type of scenario planning that military planners are accustomed to undertaking. The trends on both sides indicate that going forward each can learn a lot from the other’s scenarios.

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¹¹“Leading Through Civilian Power,” The First Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, 1, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/153108.pdf> (accessed April 24, 2015).